

Feasting the Dead

FOOD AND DRINK
IN ANGLO-SAXON
BURIAL RITUALS

Christina Lee



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FEASTING THE DEAD

Food and Drink in
Anglo-Saxon Burial Rituals

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Professor John Hines, Cardiff School of History and Archaeology,
Cardiff University, Colum Drive, Cardiff, Wales, UK CF10 3EU

Dr Catherine Cubitt, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York,
The King’s Manor, York, England, UK YO1 7EP

Boydell & Brewer, PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk, England, UK IP12
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FEASTING THE DEAD

Food and Drink in
Anglo-Saxon Burial Rituals

Christina Lee

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Für meine Eltern

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The author has made every effort to trace copyright for illustrative material within this book. Apologies are offered for any omissions in this regard, and the publishers will be pleased to add any necessary acknowledgement in subsequent editions.

Preface

The idea for the book came from two directions. During the completion of my PhD dissertation on food and drink symbolism in Anglo-Saxon culture I became aware that many pre-Christian graves seem to contain animal bone, the purpose of which was left largely unexplained. Whereas species reports are now habitually part of an archaeological examination, osteological evaluations are still mostly placed at the back of publications in 'specialist reports'. This creates the impression that animal bone is not part of the grave inventory. However, the joints and pots containing food were clearly meant to be deliberate inclusions, and should therefore be studied in the grave context.¹

The second motive for writing the book came from personal observation. Since I moved to England I have not only become aware of different foods, many of which refer to special occasions, but also of the significance of different ways of consumption. Table manners require the mastering of a multitude of rules, which have to be learned by the foreigner just as much as the language. Do you serve yourself or do you wait to be served? How much food should you consume, without appearing to be a greedy or fussy eater? Additionally, some British communities will have special eating rules, such as using the right hand only, whereas other English-speaking people have different manners altogether, as Americans, for example, do not use their knives to move food around their plates. In most cases neglecting these rules will not matter to the host, but for the incomer wanting to 'blend in' it is almost impossible to 'unlearn' habits. Since the conversion to Christianity is supposed to have influenced many changes in the eating habits of the Anglo-Saxons, as for example, monastic and clerical rules, which made the eating of certain foods undesirable (such as horseflesh), or which introduced new manners of consumption (such as fasting and the replacement of fish for meat), it is interesting to question the length of the transition process.²

¹ Recent excavation reports, such as West Heslerton, place animal bone in the context of the grave: C. Houghton and D. Powlesland *et al.*, *West Heslerton: the Anglian cemetery*, 2 vols (Yedingham: Landscape Research Centre, 1999).

² Interesting work has been done on food preferences and identity in prehistoric and Norse-settled communities. Liliana Janik, for example, claims that prehistoric European communities did not just consume the food stuffs that were available, but showed clear, culturally dependent eating preferences; 'Changing paradigms: food as a metaphor for cultural identity among the prehistoric fisher-gatherer-hunter communities of Northern Europe, in: M. Parker-Pearson ed., *Food, Culture and Identity in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age*, BAR International Series 1117 (2003), 113–23. James Barrett has shown that the arrival of the Vikings in the Orkney Isles can be traced through increased quantities of fishbone in the waste deposits; J. Barrett, R. Beukens and R. Nichol森, 'Diet and ethnicity during the Viking colonization of northern Scotland: evidence from fishbones and stable carbon isotopes', *Antiquity* 75 (2001), 145–54.

Preface

Differences in the way food is consumed are not just connected to table manners; they are often linked to deep-rooted cultural attitudes. The death of my father-in-law introduced me to another custom I had not experienced before: friends arrived with pre-cooked food dishes, which were offered to the bereaved to express their condolence. Food was given as consolation and extension of care, which made me think about the role of food in the funerary rites of early medieval England. Who would console the mourners, and did food play a part in the funerals of the Anglo-Saxons? Could the food remains, such as animal bone, eggs or eels, which are present in pre-Christian cemeteries, be remnants of such 'comfort food'? Does the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons change the nature of depositions, or just the way in which they were given?

There is some fascinating research into the role of food and eating in contemporary societies by social anthropologists, such as Mary Douglas, but similar areas in my field of study, the early Middle Ages, seem to be under-explored. The reason for this may be that for much of this period written records are either absent or patchy. A different approach is needed, one that combines results from different fields. The combination of interdisciplinary sources for the study of the early Middle Ages is not a new idea, Patrick Geary, John Hines and Bonnie Effros among others having already demonstrated that this is a highly fruitful approach. Geary sums up the advantages of interdisciplinary methods for the study of abstract constructs, such as religion, as follows:

... In conclusion, archaeologists and literary historians must recognize that any study of religion in the early Middle Ages must be grounded in the actions of early medieval societies rather than the inherited and poorly assimilated belief tradition of doctors of the Church or in the equally complex and elite Germanic oral literary tradition. [...] medieval religion was not believed but danced. To understand the 'steps' of this dance, the archaeologist must distinguish the essential structures unifying his material and establish, as it were, a model of a system of functional and representational interdependences among his sources. The textual historian must do the same. Then the two models can be juxtaposed and combined and only then be compared with articulated reflections of elite cultural traditions . . .³

This book is limited to food and drink in funerary contexts, and I am fully aware that this is an artificial restriction. Much can be said about the symbolic role of food and drink, and surely ideas expressed in the mortuary rites of the Anglo-Saxons have a connection to the role that feeding and feasting played in their society. Food remains and the vessels in which they were served are only part of the grave inventory, and the relationship between these objects and other items still needs to be examined. I am also aware that historical sources, such as wills, are documents aimed at a living society, whereas examinations of graves essentially focus on the position of the dead within their society, and I am conscious that these may be two different things. However, both share one common aspect: the relation between the living and the dead. As always, the danger of being an 'interdisciplinary' is that none of the disciplines are adequately explored. There is certainly a much more substantial body of evidence

³ P. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 44.

Preface

on food and feasting (particularly in material culture) that I am unable to cover here. I hope that the book will contribute to the ongoing dialogue between archaeologists and scholars of texts (historians, philologists and literary critics), which is deciphering the complex systems of meaning of symbols and gestures in the early Middle Ages.

The book would have not been written without the generous support of many people. My sincere gratitude goes to Richard Marsden, who has been a most magnanimous reader of various stages of the book, which would have never been written without his help. I would like to thank John Hines for constructive criticism on various drafts, as well as Chris Loveluck and Hugh Magennis for their helpful comments and Caroline Palmer for her encouragement. All mistakes, omissions and ‘fuzzy logic’, however, are my own.

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Last, but certainly not least, my sincere thanks go to my family and friends, but especially to William, who has supported me through it from beginning to end.

Nottingham, July 2006

Abbreviations

ASE	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
ASPR	<i>The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, followed by volume number</i>
ASSAH	<i>Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History</i>
B	Birch, Walter de Gray ed., <i>Cartularium Saxonicum</i> , followed by number in catalogue
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
bk	book
BL	British Library
CBA	Council for British Archaeology
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
chap.	chapter
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CUP	Cambridge University Press
EAA	East Anglian Archaeology
ed(s).	edited by
EEMSF	Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile
EETS	Early English Text Society
OS	Original Series
SS	Supplementary Series
G	Grave (followed by the number in the catalogue)
HE	Bede, <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> , ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969)
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
JEGP	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
KCLMS	King's College London Medieval Studies
l(l)	line(s)
Med Arch	<i>Medieval Archaeology</i>
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
Ms	manuscript
n.	footnote
NS	New Series
OUP	Oxford University Press
PCAS	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Cursus Completus Series Latina</i> , ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1844–55), cited by volume number and date

Abbreviations

rev.	revised
S	P.H. Sawyer ed., <i>Anglo-Saxon Charters: an annotated list and bibliography</i> (London: Royal Historical Society, 1968), followed by number in catalogue
trans.	translator(s)
vol(s)	volume(s)

Introduction

What is it that makes us human? Answers to this question vary among theologians, archaeologists and anthropologists. Is it the upright gait, which frees our hands to operate tools? Some animals, too, use implements to gain access to food-stuffs, and certainly a few of the human ancestors were already bipedal. Is it communication? In that case we have to concede that bees, birds and other creatures also communicate with one another. Yet there are two things for sure that differentiate humans from animals. The first is the ability for abstraction that allows us to use symbols in language, art and culture. The second is the understanding that our life span is finite. Evidence for this perception may be seen in the deliberate burial or cremation of the dead and the adorning of their graves. Such rites may have already been practised by one of the closest cousins of the *Homo sapiens sapiens*, namely *Homo neanderthalensis*.¹ Care for the dead may be expressed in form of the adorning the grave with flowers. A third aspect of being human is food preparation: animals have no culinary culture.

Food and drink are both a necessity and an indicator of cultural identity. The symbolism and complex ideas of human interaction embedded in meals have been widely studied by anthropologists and sociologists. For example, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has shown that meals can convey much information about the structures and hierarchies of social groups (i.e. who is served when and how, who is allowed to eat with whom and so on may be issues of great significance).² Lévi-Strauss observed that structures surrounding food and eating often mirror other constructs such as language, art and social etiquette. The correlations between food and culture have further been explored by the anthropologist Mary Douglas and the literary critic Roland Barthes.³ Both have shown that rituals connected with food and eating contain structures that can express a variety of

¹ The Neanderthal burial at Shanidar, Iraq was laid to rest on a bed of flowers, which are taken as indication of a deliberate burial rite; R.S. Solecki, *Shanidar: the first flower people* (New York: Knopf, 1971), 250. For a different view, see: Jeffrey Sommer, 'The Shanidar IV "flower burial"; a re-evaluation of Neanderthal burial ritual', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 9 (1999), 127–9.

² C. Lévi-Strauss, 'The culinary triangle', in: C. Counihan and P. van Esterik eds., *Food and Culture: a reader* (New York/London: Routledge, 1997), 28–35. The article was previously published in French as 'Le triangle culinaire', *L'Arc* 26 (1965), 19–22. Further important works by the same author with observations of eating, food and drink and culture are *Le Cru et le Cuit* (Paris: Plon, 1964) and *L'Origine des Manières de Table* (Paris: Plon, 1968).

³ R. Barthes, 'Toward a psychosociology of contemporary food consumption', in: R. Forster and O. Ranum eds., *Food and Drink in History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 166–73; M. Douglas, 'Deciphering a meal', in: M. Douglas ed., *Implicit Meanings: essays in anthropology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 249–75. An excellent overview of research into anthropological and socio-historical aspects of food and eating is H.J. Teuteberg's article '*Homo edens*: Reflexionen zu einer neuen Kulturgeschichte des Essens', *Historische Zeitschrift* 265 (1997), 1–28, at 8–13.

meanings, in the same way that language uses different registers and figures, such as metaphors and metonymy, to convey certain aspects of interaction. Language can fossilise the nature of such relations, even after semantic aspects of words have changed. For example, the relationship between a retainer and lord is expressed in the original meaning of Old English *hlaford*, 'lord', which literally means 'bread (loaf)-warden', and his wife, the *hlafdige*, 'lady': 'bread-kneader'.

Feasting in Old English literature serves two purposes: it is part of the gift exchange between lord and retainer, but it also functions as a backdrop on which such exchanges (such as ring-giving etc.) can take place.⁴ One of the most significant works on gift-exchanges is Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le Don*,⁵ in which he shows just how much the idea of giving binds 'primitive' societies. A gift requires a counter-gift, which may not be material in nature, but may consist of loyalty or devotion.⁶ If gift-giving plays an important role in the relations of the living, does it cease in death or is it possible that the dead, too, are involved in the circle of giving and receiving?

The aim of this book is to show that food offerings found in pre-Christian cemeteries were part of an elaborate system of signs that contain 'meaning'. Not all graves contain food stuffs or serving vessels and the carefully selected animals, food and drinking vessels were deliberately chosen to express attitudes that the living held about the dead. Such remains are also part of a gift-exchange, where 'feasting' symbolises a bond not only among the mourners, but also with the dead themselves. Remains of feasting may be a symbolic reminder of provisions that were once associated with the person buried here, either as donor or recipient. Some form of abstraction and replacement of actual food stuffs is apparent in the deposition of smaller or 'waste' produce, which leads to the questions of where and when funerary feasts took place. Remains in the graveyards suggest that food and drink is an aspect of the funeral itself, but the consumption of it may not take place exclusively around the grave. If there had been ceremonies away from the grave, other relations between the living and the dead may have also taken place elsewhere. There are no explicit injunctions for funerary feasting in Anglo-Saxon England until the tenth century, but Frankish sources and decrees from synods suggest that there had been a deliberate move to replace funerary feasting with other ways of feasting the dead, which also means the creation of alternative means in which the relations between the living and the dead could be played out.

⁴ See for example *Beowulf*, ll. 1020–34. Hugh Magennis especially has examined how food and drink symbolism features in Old English and related Germanic literature: 'The *Beowulf* poet and his *Druncne Dryhtguman*', *Neophilologische Mitteilungen* 86 (1985), 159–64; 'The cup as symbol and metaphor in Old English literature', *Speculum* 60 (1985), 517–36; 'The treatment of feasting in the *Heliand*', *Neophilologus* 69 (1985), 126–33; *Images of Community in Old English Poetry*, CSASE 18 (Cambridge: CUP, 1996); *Anglo-Saxon Appetites: food and drink and their consumption in Old English and related literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999).

⁵ First published in 1950 by Presses Universitaires de France, the English version was published as *The Gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*, trans. W. Halls (London: Routledge 2002, repr. of 1990).

⁶ Mauss has a short exposé on examples from Germanic law (here seeming to refer solely to German and Norse examples); *Gift*, 77–81.

Introduction

This book is concerned with Anglo-Saxon England, which was never isolated, and many developments have analogues in other early medieval societies, both in the British Isles and Western Europe. The pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons had extensive connections to the Continent, and it is feasible that fashions and trends from Frankia may have influenced native tastes. The people commonly labelled as Anglo-Saxons themselves have derived from many different groups, whose origins and patterns of migration are still poorly understood. The material culture of this period can denote many things, least of which may be 'ethnic' affiliations.

There are no written documents from pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England, apart from few runic inscriptions, which mainly occur on metalwork in graves. However, graves seem to give us insights into the complex relations between the living and the dead. Here structuralist ideas of language patterns have influenced archaeological thinking as well.⁷ In recent decades archaeologists have moved away from treating objects as expressions of an absolute (such as the association of a certain style purely as an expression of ethnic identity) to a more symbolic understanding. This approach allows objects to have a multitude of functions, where the importance or significance may alter depending on the context. Graves therefore seem to comprise a symbolism that was either deliberate or part of a cultural tradition (comparable to modern habits such as the giving of eggs for Easter; few people are conscious of the original meaning when they give a chocolate egg to their relatives). Food remains and containers, as well as drinking vessels, feature in the burials of the early Anglo-Saxons, which are mainly interpreted as 'offerings' or 'provision for the afterlife'. In the light of changing ideas of the nature of grave goods this sits uneasily with observations that have been made about other artefacts, and the purpose and context of such deposits for the dead body and for the mourners should be explored.

However, while eating with the dead seems to have been customary for all high-status Roman burials,⁸ only a minority of graves from pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England show evidence for feasting around the grave. This poses the question: who were they? In order to explain the attitudes and values associated with food and drink I have chosen to look at the provisions of living Anglo-Saxons societies, before examining the remains of food and vessels in a number of different cemeteries.

It is clear that burials in pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England are far from uniform. The living had to make choices about the method of burial (cremation or inhumation), cemetery, funerary vessel (urns, pots or other containers in the case of cremation; coffins or cists in case of interment), position of the body in the grave or on the pyre, depth and cut of the grave, and the choice of goods, if any, that should accompany the body. Such decisions were not made on an arbitrary basis. Certainly traditions will have influenced the way in which the living buried

⁷ I. Hodder, 'Theoretical archaeology: a reactionary view', in: I. Hodder ed., *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 1–16, at 6–9.

⁸ H. Lindsay, 'Eating with the dead: the Roman funerary banquet', in: I. Nielsen and H.S. Nielsen eds., *Meals in a Social Context: aspects of the communal meal in the Hellenistic and Roman world* (Århus: Århus University Press, 1998), 67–80.

Introduction

their dead, but it seems that each of these steps require an active decision, which, properly understood, may give us some indication on the roles and ideas that were associated with death.

Grave goods, as Ellen-Jane Pader has shown, offer a text that is used to convey information on the dead.⁹ Grave goods therefore are a symbolic 'language', but one, as I will show, that has many accents, and some dialects. The question of what exactly is represented through grave goods is very difficult to answer and depends on a number of factors. The much-debated 'identity' of the dead is a difficult area.¹⁰ Who decides how the dead are laid out, how they are buried? Do grave goods always indicate the social identity of the dead, so that burial with a spindle-whorl, for example, denotes a person who produced textiles in life, or could such an object have more 'identities', such as representing wealth created through this work or as someone who oversaw the production of cloth; or is it a statement of gender, since most spindle-whorls are found with skeletons that have been sexed as female? The incongruity with which objects from different periods are 'read' becomes apparent if we consider that burial with a paten or cup from a medieval context is clearly linked to that person's identity as a cleric of sorts, but that association between object and identity are less defined for the pre-Christian period. In the case of the cleric, there is surely a community that likes to bestow this burial identity to one of their own, but who in early Anglo-Saxon England decides what kind of objects are placed in the grave, how the body is adorned and what kind of identity the dead are given? Are these decisions made on the basis of local custom, or are they dependent on generic ideas of the status, gender or age of the deceased?

Recent decades have seen a fundamental shift concerning the role of grave goods in Anglo-Saxon burials. This is a move away from regarding artefacts in burials as badges of ethnicity and/or religious belief systems, towards more symbolic, social and ideological interpretations.¹¹ The interpretation of symbols from the pre-Christian period was traditionally focused on detecting ethnic or tribal affiliations, or discussions of belief systems, which has led to much speculation about the nature of pre-Christian religion. In the post-Conversion period, such speculation gives way to a much more functional interpretation. For example, a group of burials at the medieval priory of Sandwell, West Midlands, contained wooden staffs in their graves, which were interpreted as 'walking sticks', despite the fact that some of the staffs were far too short to serve this purpose.¹² This explanation is based on the understanding that the Christian burial

⁹ E.-J. Pader, *Symbolism, Social Relations and the Interpretation of Mortuary Remains*, BAR International Series 130 (Oxford, 1982).

¹⁰ A. Tyrrell, 'Corpus Saxonum: early medieval bodies and corporeal identity', in: W. Frazer and A. Tyrrell eds., *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 137–55.

¹¹ H. Williams, 'Early medieval graves: a new perspective', in: R. Collins and J. Garrard eds., *Debating Late Antiquity in Britain AD 300–700*, BAR British Series 365 (2004), 89–101.

¹² H. Williams, 'Remembering and forgetting the medieval dead: exploring death, memory and material culture in monastic archaeology', in: H. Williams ed., *Archaeologies of Remembrance: death and memory in past societies* (New York: Kluwer, 2003), 227–54, at 238.

context would exempt interpretations related to a ‘magic’ or protective nature of such objects. In contrast, the analysis of pre-Christian burial rites often favours ‘ritual’ aspects over more functional explanations.¹³ In the absence of a clearly defined pagan belief system, the evaluation of objects and their role in the rituals of the dead is left open to interpretation. This is not to say that objects in early graves never had an association with religious beliefs or that literary texts do not retain a ‘memory’ of cultural values of the past, but we should be careful not to superimpose our concept of what would have been acceptable for the interpretation of the symbolic value of artefacts.¹⁴

Symbols, according to Guy Halsall, take on different meanings in different contexts. An everyday item, he argues, acquires fresh meaning in a funerary context.¹⁵ Thus the symbolic interpretation of grave goods precludes that food and drink in burial contexts should just be regarded as provision for some kind of afterlife. Instead they represent conscious choices in the representation of the dead. The importance of feasting for group cohesion has been discussed widely recently,¹⁶ whereas funerary feasting is an accepted component of the burial ritual in late antique, as well as Merovingian and Alamannic areas.¹⁷ Interestingly, much corroborating evidence has been found in these sites, from the association of fire pits in Merovingian cemeteries with food preparation,¹⁸ whereas Anglo-Saxon archaeologists often prefer to regard such remains as ‘intrusions’, either from previous occupation or through accidental ‘mixing’.¹⁹

While man-made objects and shells in graves have been carefully examined for possible meaning, food remains, such as animal bone, have not. If food is a deliberate deposition in the grave, then it should be assumed that it too had a symbolic meaning, which may even affect the overall interpretation of the assemblage. Jacqueline McKinley, among others, has argued that wealth may be

¹³ To my knowledge, there are no comparative early Anglo-Saxon staffs. Neil Price, however, has identified some of the staffs found in Scandinavian inhumation graves with associations of *seidr*; *The Viking Way: religion and war in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, 2002), 127–61.

¹⁴ Geary has warned against the interpretation of every object in the grave as containing a religious meaning, and states that the value of cultural imports and ‘foreign’ customs should not be underestimated in a society that prized imported craft materials; *Living with the Dead*, 31–3.

¹⁵ G. Halsall, ‘Burial, ritual and Merovingian Society’, in: J. Hill and M. Swan eds., *The Community, the Family and the Saint: patterns of power in early medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 325–38, at 329.

¹⁶ See, for example, Michael Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup: ritual, prophesy and lordship in the European warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996).

¹⁷ B. Effros, *Creating a Community with Food and Drink in Merovingian Gaul* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); W. Janssen, ‘Essen und Trinken im frühen und hohen Mittelalter aus archäologischer Sicht’, in: T.J. Hoekstra, H.L. Janssen and W.L. Moerman eds., *Liber Castellorum: 40 variaties op het Thema Kasteel* (Zutphen: De Walburg, 1981), 324–37.

¹⁸ Effros, *Creating a Community*, 89.

¹⁹ One recent example is the evaluation of environmental samples taken from the King’s Garden Hostel cemetery at Cambridge. Here charred grains, charcoal and hulled barley were all taken to be ‘surface debris from nearby burning’, and were regarded, like the small samples of animal bone, as accidental; N. Dodwell, S. Lucy and J. Tipper, ‘Anglo-Saxons on the Cambridge Backs: the Criminology Site settlement and King’s Garden Hostel cemetery’, *PCAS* 43 (2004), 95–124, at 123. While it is perfectly possible that the soil of burials may have contained material from previous agricultural activity, the possibility of deliberate inclusion should at least be considered.

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measured in many ways, and that for past societies animal stock would have certainly been counted in the category of riches.²⁰ This leaves the question: how do we gauge the value of animal remains in graves? In the evaluation of wealth from graves, whether as a system of counting the 'number of artefact types' (NAT)²¹ or as measuring the 'range of identifiable artefact categories' (RIAC),²² animal bone and pottery fragments play no role, though glass vessels, copper remains from wooden vessels, hanging bowls, bowls and buckets are counted in both systems. This is partly a function of the fact that animal bone, like many other organic remains, decays easily and at many sites there is not a lot to look at.

Perhaps one indicator of the value attributed to certain species can be deduced from a comparison with the importance of animals in the local economy. Cattle bones in graves in an area renowned for a preponderance of sheep, for example, may be a statement of wealth. This method is not without problems, since much of what we know about Anglo-Saxon animal husbandry comes from the post-Conversion period, which saw changes in landholding as well as a rise of trading centres that needed provisions that may have been easy to transport and store. All of these may have led to changes in the cultivation of the land. Fortunately, there have been a few excavations of early settlements that provide insights into the animals and food stuffs of the small rural settlements that dominated the early Anglo-Saxon period.

It should be observed that not all Anglo-Saxons are buried with food and/or drink deposits, and that the form, quantity and quality of such deposits can vary markedly. In many cases those buried with food remains have few other grave goods, suggesting a lower status. On the other hand, remains of drinking vessels are only found at the top end of the scale. Certain groups are more likely to be buried with food vessels than others, in particular children, which may be an expression of care, rather than status. There is not one single picture, and we should consider that such objects had multiple meanings.

The evaluation of potential food vessels is complicated by the fact that pottery vessels can resemble urns, and sherds could potentially derive from broken funerary vessels. The practice of reusing Romano-British burial sites complicates the analysis of pottery sherds, since fragments from earlier vessels may have been accidental inclusions. However, since Romano-British artefacts, such as coins, were used as grave goods in Anglo-Saxon burials,²³ a deliberate insertion cannot be excluded. Romano-British burials habitually contained pots and containers, and the deposition of food remains was practised widely.

²⁰ J. McKinley, 'Animal bone', in: J. McKinley, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Spong Hill, Part VIII: The cremations*, EAA 69 (Dereham: Norfolk Archaeology Unit, 1994), 92–100, at 92. Julian Richards, too, regards animal bone in cremations as a significant symbolic statement; *The Significance of Form and Decoration of Anglo-Saxon Cremation Urns*, BAR British Series 166 (1987), 200.

²¹ C. Arnold, 'Wealth and social structure: matter of life and death', in: P. Rahtz, T. Dickinson and L. Watts eds., *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries 1979*, BAR British Series 82 (1980), 81–142.

²² This system was used by Tim Malim and John Hines in the analysis of Edix Hill: *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Edix Hill (Barrington A), Cambridgeshire*, CBA Research Report 112 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1998), 301–7.

²³ R. White, *Roman and Celtic Objects from Anglo-Saxon Graves*, BAR British Series 191 (Oxford, 1988).

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To confuse matters even more it is also feasible that inhumations of the sixth and seventh centuries not only disturbed earlier graves, but also may have destroyed cremation urns and burials from the early Anglo-Saxon period. Some graves have been reused, sometimes to add another body, but occasionally bones have been scooped aside to make way for a new burial. The reasons for the reuse of some graves but not others are yet poorly understood.²⁴ Nevertheless, it is clear from cremation urns, such as those found at Spong Hill, that the animal bone contained in them had been cremated with or without the body before it was carefully collected and placed inside the funerary vessel. In some cases urns also contained pottery sherds. While the majority of such sherds from Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemeteries may be stray finds, it is possible that, just like stones, some are not accidental inclusions but have been placed there on purpose, and are part of the symbolic language that was understood by those who buried the dead.

Meat deposits, drinking vessels and even pottery sherds are all connected to consumption. While such items are undeniably present in the early Anglo-Saxon period, they are absent from later burials. Feasting, as discussed below, plays an important role in early medieval societies. It is an occasion where power and relations can be made visible. I will consider the possibility that feasting may have included the dead and may have even taken place around the grave, as indicated in some of the finds from the backfills of graves.²⁵

Whereas the pagan dead are often portrayed almost as a blank canvas on which others could 'display' various messages (identity, gender, tribal affiliation etc.), the Christian dead are seen as active agents in the relation between the living and dead. This is best illustrated in the cult of saints, who continue to work from beyond the grave by interceding and healing, and who continue to occupy spaces in the world of the living. Since there are many differences in the burial of the dead in pagan Anglo-Saxon England, could there have already been some multiplicity in the choices of burial 'identity' that continued to exist?

With the arrival of literacy the ways in which the living were agents of their own legacies are made visible. Wills and other legal documents ensure that the intentions of the donors are not forgotten and that their wishes are carried out. Increasingly remembrance is an obligation that is bought with bequests. This, as Julia Crick has pointed out, may have led to a clash of interest between the heirs and the deceased, since any form of elaborate funerary display draws wealth away from those who are to inherit it.²⁶ The difference between the pagan and Christian dead is often perceived to be fundamental, and yet, as recently pointed out, the difference between pre-Christian Europe and its successor is not as marked as previously suggested. The early Middle Ages are more like a long transition

²⁴ N. Stoodley, 'Multiple burials, multiple meanings: interpreting the early Anglo-Saxon multiple interment', in: S. Lucy and A. Reynolds eds., *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales* (London: Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2002), 103–21.

²⁵ The backfill consists of the earth that is used to cover and close the grave.

²⁶ J. Crick, 'Posthumous obligation and family identity', in: W. Frazer and A. Tyrrell eds., *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 193–208, at 197.

period that saw the continuation of old rites next to the introduction of new ones.²⁷ Rites continued to exist, not because they represented an obstinate adherence to 'pagan' ideas, but because they had a meaning for a variety of people, and this meaning was not primarily associated with religious performance. It is rather that religion appropriated some of such forms of social cohesion because they proved to be very useful in the forming of new identities.

The relationship between the living and the dead is paradoxical, as Patrick Geary has pointed out. On the one hand, the dead need to be pushed away for the living to resume normal activities, but at the same time the dead are required to give the living a point of reference for their social bonds.²⁸ There is an additional complicating factor, insofar as the dead had bequeathed much to the living (life, property and identity). This imbalance gave the donor rights over the living, which could only be balanced through a counter-gift.²⁹

In recent studies there has been a great interest in the 'non-verbal' communication of the Middle Ages.³⁰ In order to understand the gestures and symbols embedded in this language, modern readers need to develop a literacy in this field, which in the absence of literary expressions may be difficult. It is possible that symbolic acts that were easily understood by medieval people have been overlooked by modern scholars.³¹ For example, before the advent of literacy there is virtually no information of how bequests and inheritance were handled. In the absence of wills, how was property divided and how were claims to possession staked? At what stage did people give away their property – before death or after? Is there any legal act in which heirs were named? Since the feast seems to be central to all act of group cohesion, it is feasible to assume that funerary feasting may have been the first occasion of a 'new' family constellation where roles and responsibilities had been redrawn. Death, as Frederick Paxton has observed, is a rite of passage and the dead have a liminal status, since they have crossed a threshold. The mourners, too, have suspended their normal activities. To close gaps and reinstate normal conditions of social life rituals are needed, which include communal meals.³² It is possible that bequests were dispensed at the time when mourners came to take their leave of the dead by those who acted as the executor of the legacy of the deceased.³³ With the arrival of literacy there are alternate forms in which relations can be arranged, and customs may have

²⁷ Geary, *Living with the Dead*, 33–5.

²⁸ Geary, *Living with the Dead*, 78.

²⁹ Geary, *Living with the Dead*, 78.

³⁰ See, for example, G. Althoff, 'Zur Bedeutung symbolischer Kommunikation für das Verständnis des Mittelalters', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 31 (1997), 370–89.

³¹ Or, as Bonnie Effros cautions, are in danger of being read through later literary sources, derived from different backgrounds; *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology and the Making of the Early Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), n. 135 at 163.

³² F. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: the creation of a ritual process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1996, 2nd edn), 6.

³³ The grave seems to have functioned as a focus of legal transactions, as suggested in a law of the seventh-century King Æthelberht of Kent, which states that in the case of homicide a part of the compensation had to be paid over the 'open grave'; F. Liebermann ed. and trans., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903–16), I, 4.a

become obsolete. The occasion at which the property of the dead was dispensed may have continued in some form or other.

This change may be measured in the decline of related objects that symbolise feasting. For example, on the Continent food and drink utensils are most popular in fourth-century rural cemeteries, but by the early medieval period their incidence had declined drastically.³⁴ Instead of assuming that Christian clerics had undermined funerary feasting, there may have been a more practical reason, which sees the favouring of alternative forms bequeathing gifts, such as a will or a charter.

There has been much interest in the symbolic role of feasting in the culture of the Middle Ages.³⁵ Gerd Althoff in particular has emphasised the role of feasting for the strengthening and establishing of communities.³⁶ Feasting in medieval narratives and histories signifies that an agreement has been reached between parties. For example, the eleventh-century chronicler Adam of Bremen describes how Archbishop Adalbert feasts with the Danish King Svein Estrithson for eight days, as is the custom of the Danes, in order to establish a peace treaty.³⁷ Feasting takes on an important symbolic role in a society where symbolic acts have the same significance as written agreements today.³⁸ A *convivium*, according to Althoff, is not just part of a subjective emotional gesture, but has the character of a contract.³⁹

³⁴ Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology*, 163–4.

³⁵ To name but a few: G. Althoff, 'Der frieden-bündnis- und gemeinschaftsstiftende Charakter des Mahles im frühen Mittelalter', in: I. Bitsch, T. Ehlert and X. von Ertzdorff eds., *Essen und Trinken im Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1987), 13–25; see also his 'Fest und Bündnis', in: D. Altenburg, J. Jarnut and H.-J. Steinhoff eds., *Feste und Feiern im Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1991), 29–38 and 'Zur Bedeutung symbolischer Kommunikation'; D. Bullough, *Friends, Neighbours and Fellow-drinkers: aspects of community and conflict in the Early Medieval West*, H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lecture 1 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, 1991); Effros, *Creating a Community*; see also P. Johaneck, 'Fest und Integration', in: Altenburg, Jarnut and Steinhoff eds., *Feste und Feiern im Mittelalter*, 525–40, who draws mainly on Continental sources. For Celtic narratives, see H. Tristram, 'Feis und Fled: Wirklichkeit und Darstellung in mittelalterlichen irischen Gastmahlerzählungen', in: H. Tristram ed., *Medialität und mittelalterliche insulare Literatur* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1992), 183–220.

³⁶ G. Althoff, 'Mahles' and 'Fest und Bündnis', in: Altenburg *et al.* eds., *Feste und Feiern*, 29–38, at 29: Mit Mählern und Festen begründete und stärkte man die Gemeinschaft, schuf und erprobte eine Atmosphäre des friedlichen Umgangs miteinander, die auch in der Zukunft die Grundlage des Verhältnisses von Speisenden und Feiernden bilden sollte. 'Meals and feasts were used to initiate and strengthen communities, meals created and practised an atmosphere of peaceful interaction, which formed a future basis of relations between those who had eaten and feasted together.'

³⁷ B. Schmeidler ed., *Adam Bremensis, Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, MGH Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum 2 (Hanover: Hahn, 1917), chap. 18, 161.

³⁸ Althoff, 'Mahles', 14–15.

³⁹ Althoff, 'Mahles', 17:

Wir dürfen also festhalten: Das feierliche Mahl oder Gelage hatte im früheren Mittelalter seinen festen, ja konstituiven Platz beim Abschluß von Bündnissen, die wir als freundschaftlich-genossenschaftliche charakterisieren können. Solche Bindungen aber waren nicht Ausdruck einer subjektiven Gefühlsäußerung, sondern hatten Vertragscharakter, sie verpflichteten für die Zukunft zu einem entsprechenden Verhalten.

'To sum up: the ceremonial meal or feast in the early Middle Ages had its firm, if not consolidating place at the conclusion of treaties, which we can characterise to be of a friendly or co-operative

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Peter Johanek proposes that the feast is seen as a constituent element of princely supremacy in literature as well. The feast integrates the members of a group into one body and is a fundamental element of social cohesion. In *Beowulf*, the communal drink activates a system of norms that are inherent in the war-band, so that differences of rank and social position are emphasised in the hall. Feasts thus create a communal 'past' among the retinue, which is further enhanced by the *scop*'s evocation of shared events. The event itself becomes part of the emotional memory of all who have attended it and has the role of integrating participants into the communal memory.⁴⁰ Indeed, Johanek's description of the feast is not far from the Christian celebration of the Eucharist, where the assembled members share in the communal remembrance of the past in order to continue and renew their fellowship.

Christianity has been shaped by its long association with the Ancient world, and it is not difficult to find analogies between Roman rituals of eating with the dead and early Christian memorial celebrations. Additionally, some recurrent feasts of the dead, such as the *Parentalia*, an annual festival celebrated from the 13th to the 21st or 22nd February or the *Lemuria*, a feast in May to appease the spirits of dead ancestors with food, could have been easily appropriated for Christian purposes. In the case of the former it coincides with feast day of the Chair of St Peter on 22 February, which remembers the founder of the Christian Church, and in the case of the latter it covers the Great Litanies, a period of atonement. In contrast to Roman festivities Christian feast days do not encourage lavish eating or drinking – quite the opposite: they were meant to be fast days. From late Antiquity onwards Christian attitudes towards food had been cautious at best,⁴¹ and there was a conscious drive to put the food served at these occasions to better use, as alms for the needy or as donations for the soul.⁴²

However, little of the actual mortuary rites are visible to us, perhaps because such mundane actions were not thought worthy of recording. Nevertheless, we do have evidence for the care of the dead and the position of the dead, as ancestor and donor, in charters, treatises on pastoral care and hagiographies. In many of these a transaction seem to occur: provisions of land and goods that would sustain those who inherit and care for the dead, were traded. This is no different from the gift-exchange, and historians have noted the intricate transaction of 'prayers for payers'.⁴³

Most extant written accounts of feasting place the emphasis on the act of conviviality, rather than the food stuffs consumed. Karl Hauck's seminal article

nature. Such meetings were not the expression of subjective emotions, but had the character of a contract: they obliged [the participants] to behave in an appropriate manner in future.'

⁴⁰ Johanek, 'Fest und Integration', *passim*.

⁴¹ See, for example, Tertullian's statement that an emaciated body will find salvation more easily; Tertullian, *De Ieiunio adversus Psychicos*, A. Reifferscheid and G. Wissowa eds., *Tertulliani Opera Pars II: Opera Monastica*, CCSL 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 1256–77, at 1276.

⁴² There is no Anglo-Saxon legislation, but Effros has shown that clerics such as the sixth-century Martin of Braga banned Christians from taking food to the dead; *Creating a Community*, 77.

⁴³ Arnold Angenendt, 'Theologie und Liturgie der mitteleuropäischen Toten-Memoria', in: K. Schmid and J. Wollasch eds., *Memoria: der geschichtliche Zeugniswert des liturgischen Gedenkens im Mittelalter* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1984), 79–199.

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on feasting in tenth- and eleventh-century secular and monastic congregations, shows the importance of recurrent feasts for social groups.⁴⁴ One of the duties of those who have benefited from the largesse of the dead is the ritual commemoration of the deceased, which was encouraged by the Church in regular intervals, during which family and friends were given the opportunity to pray for the deceased's soul.⁴⁵

Christianity may not have only tried to influence the way in which the dead were remembered, but also changed the place at which commemorative celebrations took place. In this context the work of Nikolaus Kyll should be mentioned. Kyll has shown in an analysis of mortuary rites of the ninth-century Trier region of Germany, that rituals that previously had been a private affair now had to be celebrated in a church, rather than in the graveyard or in the home.⁴⁶ Kyll has succinctly demonstrated that there are changes in burial rites that affect the way in which mourners could participate. While there are similarities between continental rites and Anglo-Saxon England, a comparable study is still outstanding. One of the reasons for this lack is that there are far fewer sources from an English context to go by. Continental capitularies, synods and clerical writings make reference to the *sacrificia mortuorum*, 'sacrifices for the dead', but Anglo-Saxon writers remain silent until the period of Ælfric. This lack of instruction should not be regarded as a proof of absence.

The development of ritual commemoration has been described as an 'English' invention.⁴⁷ Boniface and Bede in particular have been credited with developing ritual remembrance. In the case of continental missionaries, there was no grave that any mourner, even if they should have wanted to, could have used for commemorative acts, such as mortuary sacrifices. Instead there was a conscious drive to ensure other forms of remembrance. All of these depended on reciprocity and had to be paid for.⁴⁸

The role of food and drink in Christian death rituals has been examined by Otto Oexle, who has noted the importance of meals in the medieval cults of the dead, which could take the forms of feeding the poor from the deceased's bequest or a feast sponsored either before or after death. Often there was room for both. Sponsoring a feast for a monastic community had the purpose of uniting the name of the donor with that of a religious house, thus making him a part of the 'family'. Since donors could choose the foundation they wanted to endow with their gifts, feasts gave status to the living as well as the dead and also reaffirmed the bonds of relationship.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ K. Hauck, 'Rituelle Speisegemeinschaft im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert', *Studium Generale* 3 (1950), 611–21.

⁴⁵ Masses could be said on the third, sixth and fortieth day after the funeral.

⁴⁶ N. Kyll, *Tod, Grab, Begräbnisplatz, Totenfeier: Zur Geschichte ihres Brauchtums in Trierer Lande und in Luxemburg unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Visitationshandbuchs des Regino von Prüm* († 915) (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1972), 8.

⁴⁷ J. Gerchow, *Die Gedenküberlieferung der Angelsachsen mit einem Katalog der libri vitae und Nekrologien* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988), 8.

⁴⁸ O. Oexle, 'Mahl und Spende im mittelalterlichen Totenkult', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 18 (1984), 401–20, at 403–6.

⁴⁹ Oexle, 'Mahl und Spende', 402.

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The inclusion of paupers through alms would increase the group of people who were indebted by what we might call the ‘hospitality of the deceased’. Such indebtedness was an important aspect of memory, since it was assumed that the intercession of the living was pivotal for the dead. According to medieval belief, the soul needed assistance after death and its ascent to heaven could be hastened by prayers. These prayers were ‘paid for’ by the legacy of the deceased. While the concept of purgatory is not fully formed until the high Middle Ages, there is an understanding even in the earliest *ordines* for the dead in the fourth and fifth centuries that the soul may take a different path to damnation.⁵⁰ Gregory the Great (540–604) writes in the *Dialogues* that the celebration of masses is possibly beneficial to the soul after death,⁵¹ and Gregory’s works were an important source for Anglo-Saxon writers from Bede onwards.

The community stands at the core of medieval society, and it is not surprising that the donors and recipients of gifts often understood themselves to be ‘family members’. Monasticism especially, with its communities of ‘brothers’, became an influential role model for the creation of ‘artificial’ relations.⁵² It is understandable that monks and nuns, who had no children, and therefore no heirs who could perform the duties of commemoration, chose to establish alternative bonds. Lay people, as well, chose to become part of such ‘family’ groups. Royal houses often sponsored their commemoration by the founding of churches and through bequests. Parents ‘offered’ their children as oblates to monastic houses, in the hope for intercession.

In monasteries the donations of the new ‘family member’ were repaid with what was known as a *convivium in refectorio*. This meal in honour of the dead benefactor was celebrated *in memoriam*, that is, in his or her memory.⁵³ However, it appears that by late Anglo-Saxon England the *convivio* includes prayers for the living as well, such as the king and queen. Contemporary continental sources, such as the tenth-century writer Ekkehard of St Gall, give more exhaustive descriptions of how such commemorative drinks taken in the *refectorium*, which have the king as sponsor, may have been celebrated.⁵⁴ For Anglo-Saxon evidence we need to look to monastic rules, such as the *Regularis Concordia*, to which all tenth-century monasteries after the Benedictine Reform should adhere. The rule demands that on Saturdays the monks should draw a portion of drink and enter the refectory for what is called the ‘*caritas*’.⁵⁵

The term *caritas* translates as ‘charity’ or ‘love’ and is used by biblical writers such as Paul to denote the care that should be extended by Christians to one

⁵⁰ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 37–40.

⁵¹ *Dialogii, Sancti Gregori Papae: Opera Omnia* V, PL 77 (1896), bk iv, chap. 50, 416–17.

⁵² For want of a better word I translate the term that German scholars have given to such relations. Oexle and others talk of *künstliche Verwandtschaften* in contrast to *natürliche Verwandtschaften* (i.e. blood relations).

⁵³ Oexle, ‘Mahl und Spende’, 411.

⁵⁴ H. Haeflerle (ed. and trans.), *Ekkehard IV: St Galler Kloster geschichten* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), esp. chap. 6–7.

⁵⁵ T. Symons (ed. and trans.), *The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), 21–2.

another.⁵⁶ It appears that in early medieval monastic contexts this *caritas* denotes primarily intercession and commemoration, which was accompanied by a drink. One important point of the *caritas* celebrations is that they are sponsored. In England, as well as in continental sources, kings and queens appear as sponsors and benefactors, and were remembered in such celebrations.⁵⁷

There remains uncertainty whether the *caritas* and the *convivium in refectorio* in Anglo-Saxon monasteries were part of one celebration or were two separate events. The *caritas* celebration seems to have had roots in pre-Christian commemorative ceremonies, as well as in the Christian rituals, and was called *minne* or *minni* in Germanic languages. Ute Schwab claims that a consistency of ritualised commemorative drinking existed from Germanic to early modern times.⁵⁸ However, there is no vernacular cognate for *minni* in Old English and we know next to nothing about pagan customs.

Joachim Wollasch claims that the *caritas* is derived from a systematic fraternisation of members from different monasteries.⁵⁹ His evidence is partly based on the letters of Boniface, which tell of desire of the *peregrinus* to be remembered in his native country.⁶⁰ For missionaries, who often worked alone, such arrangements had a practical function: if they died abroad they would most certainly lack a Christian funeral. Therefore, they aimed to establish connections with monastic communities prior to their departure into unknown territory and asked for prayers of intercession. This is an important development, since it allows members of a community to secure their own commemoration, rather than relying on their family alone. It allows the living to become agents of their own funeral rites. For religious, who theoretically had nothing to bequeath to their 'family', there was the currency of prayers that could be offered.

The terminology used by various scholars in connection with rituals of remembrance can be confusing. While the *caritas* and *convivium in refectorio* are definitely linked to food and drink, the case is less clear-cut with *memoria*, a term that is used often and seems to denote various concepts of commemoration, but appears to have been shaped primarily by modern scholars. Wollasch, for example, uses it for all forms of ritual commemoration, which can include the naming of the dead in the liturgy but also the feast in honour of a dead sponsor. To my knowledge there is no mention of *memoria* in medieval texts, but many acts are performed *in memoriam*, and there is some early Christian evidence for ritualised remembrance. In his *De civitate Dei*, Augustine calls the pagan

⁵⁶ 1 Corinthians 13: 1–8.

⁵⁷ Hauck, 'Rituelle Speisegemeinschaft'. It appears that the *caritas* on the Continent was celebrated with a substantial meal, but that in contrast to Anglo-Saxon customs it was only celebrated on certain days of the year, mainly on the feast of St Andrew and the feast of St John the Baptist; Hauck, 'Speisegemeinschaft', 617.

⁵⁸ Bullough, *Friends, Neighbours*, 9; U. Schwab, 'Weinverschütten und Minnetrinken', in: K. Zatloukal ed., *Pöchlarnes Heldengesänge: das Nibelungenlied und der mittlere Donauraum* (Vienna: Fassbaender, 1990), 59–101, at 79.

⁵⁹ J. Wollasch, 'Die mittelalterliche Lebensform der Verbrüderung', in: K. Schmidt and J. Wollasch eds., *Memoria: Der geschichtliche Zeugniswert des liturgischen Gedenkens im Mittelalter* (Munich: Fink, 1984), 215–32.

⁶⁰ Wollasch, 'Verbrüderung', 218–20.

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commemoration of the dead *memorias*,⁶¹ but uses the same word for the shrines of the saints.⁶² Clerics such as Alcuin talk about the obligation to pray for the commemoration of all who were gathered around the altar, the living and the dead.⁶³ Since *memoria*, with or without food, are essentially derived from a ritual that included the giving of provisions in the name of a dead sponsor or for the sake of their memory, I will use the term for all kinds of commemorative offices.

Not only were monastic communities 'paid' to remember the name of a sponsor, but patrons aimed to involve as many other groups as possible. As noted above, this included the feeding the poor in the name of the sponsor, but the creation of friendship relations could further expand the group beyond blood relatives. *Amicitia*, 'friendship', is a cornerstone of early medieval relations and was widely used to confirm and strengthen communities. The system of friendship has been mainly studied by historians, who have linked it to other important developments, such as the *memoria*, but also to feasting and providing.

Wollasch traces the roots of the *memoria* back to convivial communities in Antiquity and the early Church, but he also grants some influence to the Germanic custom of *amicitia*, a custom that involved taking an oath of friendship and mutual support. Althoff shows that such oaths had a legal character, and the formula *amicus amicis inimicus inimicis*, 'friend to [his] friends, enemy to [his] enemy', bound both groups to shun contact with the enemies of each other.⁶⁴ 'Friends' give military support, meet, either in person or through envoys, and treat one another with honour. The ritual of friendship in the Middle Ages is always public and can be sealed with a *convivium*. Donald Bullough has examined feasting as part of a ritual in both monastic and secular contexts,⁶⁵ and stresses the importance of *amicitia*, a term virtually unknown in biblical texts, but which becomes one of the central ideas of the Carolingians, and was often mentioned in the context of feasting. Bullough writes that feasting served to establish a mutual agreement between partners and highlights the 'feel-good factor' that such assemblies created between neighbours and partakers. Feasting therefore creates *amicitia*. However, it is not always strictly necessary to meet at table in order to achieve 'good relations through feasting', as the gift of two white horns and two goblets by Bishop Heahberht to the king and queen of Mercia in 840 shows.⁶⁶ Even if these objects would not be used, their association is with feasting and they underline the bond between both parties.

The forming of political friendship in early Carolingian times was a prerogative of the regent, and was only extended towards other sovereigns, such as kings,

⁶¹ B. Dombart and A. Kalb eds., *Sancti Aurelii Augustini: De Civitate Dei*, 2 vols, CCSL 47 and 48 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), 248.

⁶² G. Constable, 'The commemoration of the dead in the early Middle Ages', in: J.M.H. Smith ed., *Early Rome and the Christian West: essays in honour of Donald A. Bullough* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 169–95, at 176.

⁶³ Wollasch, 'Verbrüderung', 215.

⁶⁴ G. Althoff, *Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue: zum politischen Stellenwert der Gruppenbindungen in früheren Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 92.

⁶⁵ Bullough, *Friends, Neighbours*.

⁶⁶ Bullough, *Friends, Neighbours*, 21.

emperors or the pope. In the course of Carolingian history friendship could also be offered to nobles within the realm, and Althoff suggests this reflects the growing influence of the nobility.⁶⁷ While we do not have clear evidence for a ritual *convivium* with which *amicitia* was sealed in Anglo-Saxon England, friendship plays an important role in the forming of relations between different groups. In charters, friendship is associated with gift-giving, which often includes estates, which in turn generate food and sustenance. *Amicitia* does not appear to play a role in early Anglo-Saxon England, but became an important aspect of the relationship between the king and the institutions he sponsored in the eighth century. Julia Barrow has examined 'friendship' in Anglo-Saxon charters and has shown how declarations of friendship do not occur before the year 790 and that suspect charters, which were likely to be forgeries, make little mention of *amicitia*.⁶⁸ This is an interesting point, since the institution of 'friendship' occurs at the same time as liturgical *memoria* is requested in return for gifts and donations. Friendship appears to be a further aspect of the complex arrangements between the king and religious and secular institutions, which include sponsored feasts in memory and also provide the institutions with sustenance and protection. The king's *amicitia* seems to include the giving of gifts and the goodwill of the monarch in return for support of all kinds: spiritual intercession as well as political allegiance.

Friendship and memory supersede whatever other funerary feasting may have occurred. The posthumous provision of the beneficiaries is increasingly orchestrated and arranged during the life of the sponsor, which may deflect from the point that they are given as a gift from the dead, who expect reciprocity. This system creates communities, tied through 'friendship', and the prospect of intended gifts, which were promised in wills and bequests (which, in contrast to modern versions, were public documents *ante mortem*).

Feasting the dead was practised throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, but material culture from early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries shows that not everybody was the recipient of a feast. It is possible that there may have already been a custom of celebrating the funerary meal away from the grave, or even that objects could be placed in the grave as a symbolic representative of the relationship expressed through feasting (such as animal decoration standing in lieu of food stuffs or pottery sherds instead of complete vessels). It seems that food and feasting have an important role in the relations between different groups of society in Anglo-Saxon England. In this mainly agrarian society the ability to create and command surplus is an important tool of establishing power. If part of this wealth is invested in the burial of the dead, then this shows that feasting is a marker of status, similar to the deposition of brooches. The amount of this investment, however, seems to change over time. The journey from symbol to symbolic replacement is not always easy to trace, and forms of feasting had possibly already changed from the earliest period to the first literary presentations of burials in Anglo-Saxon texts.

⁶⁷ Althoff, *Verwandte*, 96.

⁶⁸ J. Barrow, 'Friends and friendship in Anglo-Saxon charters', in: J. Haseldine ed., *Friendship in Medieval Europe* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 106–23.

Eorðan wæstmas: a Feast for the Living

IT MAY perhaps seem a little unusual to begin a study on food in the mortuary rituals of the Anglo-Saxons with an examination of agriculture and foods available to living populations. However, food served on special occasions, such as wakes, may have been radically different from the everyday meals consumed in the homes of the Anglo-Saxons. To understand the value of food and feasting in the funerary culture of the Anglo-Saxons it is necessary to take stock of the kind of victuals that could have been part of such a ritual. If, for example, the species pattern found in graves differs much from that of the animals consumed in the surrounding areas it may suggest a different value attached to such food stuffs, which may either be related to the occasion (which may have restricted the choice of foods), or may be indications about the identity attributed to the dead. Since only a small number of people are buried with animal bone, is there any discernible pattern (as observed for weapon burials or brooches), which may indicate what meaning such artefacts had for their contemporaries? Perhaps certain foods are exclusive to some members of society (such as red deer, which can only be obtained by hunting), and this may give us additional information about the social stratification of Anglo-Saxon society.

The social groups who worked, governed and possessed the land changed considerably during the course of Anglo-Saxon history, and the status of these people may be mirrored in their food production and consumption.¹ Food and status are closely related in hierarchical societies. The wealthy parts of society generally have access to a greater variety of food stuffs, partly because they possess surplus through extended livestock and fields, but also because they may have benefited from taxation and access to imported goods. The development of an Anglo-Saxon aristocracy may have taken more than a century from the migration to Britain. Before AD 600, as Chris Wickham has observed, settlements show little in the way of social differentiation, though there are clearly visible status differences in the grave goods excavated from early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries.² It is not before 600 that settlements become more developed, which incidentally coincides with elaborate elite burials, such as Sutton Hoo (Suffolk),

¹ Examinations of Anglo-Saxon food, such as Anne Hagen's *A Second Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food and Drink: production and distribution* (Hockwold-cum-Wilton: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1995) and Debbie Banham's recent work *Food and Drink in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004) generally side-step chronological developments, partly because there is very little information on the stratification.

² C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 341 and 502–4. Wickham assumes that the settlement of the Anglo-Saxons took place on a small political scale in a landscape dominated by economic crisis, 503.

Prittlewell (Essex) and Taplow (Buckinghamshire). These ‘princely’ graves have been associated with the ‘Final Phase’ (c. 580– c. 700) of furnished burials,³ and all of them contain insignia of feasting, as well as imported grave goods, which may underline the importance of the deceased not only on a local level but also as possessing far-reaching connections. Written sources, such as Bede, describe leading groups, including kings and *duces*, who preside over larger seventh-century political territories.⁴ Laws emerging from the period also have differentiated compensation tariffs for the various members of society. Della Hooke has observed that until the middle of the seventh century it is doubtful whether a ‘middle tier’ of society existed in Anglo-Saxon England that would fit the role of a landed thegn.⁵ She argues that the reorganisation of the land, which is evident in the emerging nucleation of settlements from the seventh century onwards, went hand-in-hand with social reorganisation.⁶ However, whereas undoubtedly the political and territorial influence of the leading figures will have grown during the eighth century, the size of settlements remains relatively stable until the middle of the ninth century.⁷

Information on land tenure is patchy for the early Anglo-Saxon period. With the introduction of legal documents we not only get some information of who was entitled to possession, but also the way in which this land was managed. There still remain enough grey areas, such as who held uncharted land, the question of the size of a ‘hide’, the standard measurement for land possession, and the differences in legal terminologies, such as *bocland*, ‘bookland’ (charted land) and *folcland*, ‘peoples’ land’.⁸ It seems that a minimum amount of land was necessary to be called a *thegn*.⁹ It is clear that there is a complex social stratification, in which free and unfree tenants will have worked for a landowner, who himself was subject to a larger administrative unit.

Outside the developments around land tenure lies another fundamental change: the transition from gift-exchange to a market economy.¹⁰ Evidence for trade is apparent from imported luxury goods in graves in the earliest Anglo-Saxon period. However, these will have possibly only had a very limited circulation among the very top end of society, where they may have been part of a

³ The period of furnished burials in Anglo-Saxon England is dated from A.D. 450 to around 730; H. Geake, *The Use of Grave Goods in Conversion-Period England*, c. 600–c. 850, BAR British Series 261 (Oxford, 1997), 134. The coffins and tombs of ecclesiasts continued to be furnished with religious objects and gifts, such as the reburial of St Cuthbert in the tenth century where donations from King Athelstan were added to the existing assembly; C.F. Battiscombe, *The Relics of St Cuthbert* (Oxford: OUP, 1956).

⁴ For a discussion of Bede, see Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 343. Wickham writes that while the development of an aristocracy was far advanced in the eighth century, the level of land tenure was rather slower, 340.

⁵ D. Hooke, ‘The Mid-Late Anglo-Saxon period: settlement and land use’, in: D. Hooke and S. Burnell eds., *Landscape and Settlement in Britain AD 400–1066* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2003, reprint of 1995), 95–114, at 97.

⁶ Hooke, ‘Mid-Late Anglo-Saxon period’, 96–9.

⁷ Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 503.

⁸ For a debate and sources, see Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 314–33.

⁹ Which seems to have been five hides: Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 319.

¹⁰ R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics: the origins of towns and trade* (London: Duckworth, 1982).

gift-exchange. While some former Roman towns have been settled in the early Anglo-Saxon period (such as Caistor), it is not before the eighth century that semi-urban sites emerge. These tended to be inhabited by permanent craft workers (rather than peripatetic), which allowed for a different set of goods being produced (such as mass-produced staples). Urban sites had to be provided for, but their dietary preferences may have differed from those of the land-working population.¹¹

Information on the food production and produce available to the Anglo-Saxon comes from a number of sources, but unfortunately most of them are from the middle to the late Anglo-Saxon context, which may have already seen changes in the farming patterns of some regions.¹² According to Pam Crabtree animal bone recovered from settlement sites has so far been most commonly used to study husbandry patterns, hunting patterns and diet.¹³ Evidence is derived from the waste produce of such sites, such as remnants of cereals, nuts and fruit kernels found with middens. Some of these places were abandoned at some stage, which has the advantage that they remain relatively intact for the excavator. Many sites may have escaped detection, because they continued to be inhabited and are still buried deep below the modern surfaces of towns.¹⁴ The finds situation is complicated by the conditions of preservation for highly perishable organic material, since, as Helena Hamerow has pointed out, large swathes of Northern Europe are covered with acidic soil, which is not conducive to bone preservation. Bone assemblages from rural areas often survive in such a poor state that they cannot be considered representative.¹⁵

In late Anglo-Saxon England there is the additional evidence from written sources. These encompass medical texts, charters and instructional prose, as well as religious sources. However, not all of them can be used as evidence, since they may represent practices that are either non-native (such as hagiography and some medical texts, which were copied largely from Mediterranean sources) or addressed only a small number of people (such as monks). Since literacy was on a limited scale, other written sources may have also only addressed parts of society, which may not necessarily be the same people that provided the archaeological remains. Generally the rich left more evidence, both in archaeological remains (ranging from grave goods to buildings) and texts. Two treatises, which principally concern the management of estates, give an insight into the vertical relations

¹¹ J. Barrett, A. Locker and C.M. Roberts, '“Dark Age Economics” revisited: the English fish bone evidence AD 600–1600', *Antiquity* 78 (2004), 618–36, at 630–1.

¹² C. Stevens and M. Robinson, 'Plant cultivation' in: G. Hey ed., *Yarnton: Saxon and Medieval Settlement and Landscape, Results of Excavations 1990–96*, Thames Valley Landscape Monograph 20 (Oxford: Oxford Archaeological Unit, 2004), 81–3. See also: Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 346–53.

¹³ P. Crabtree, 'The symbolic role of animals in Anglo-Saxon England: evidence from burials and cremations', in: K. Ryan and P. Crabtree eds., *The Symbolic Role of Animals in Archaeology*, MASCA Research Papers in Science and Archaeology 12 (Philadelphia: University of Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 1995), 20–6, at 21.

¹⁴ This should not detract from the fact that sites such as Mucking, West Stowe, Yarnton and West Heslerton were successful during the time of their settlement.

¹⁵ H. Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements: the archaeology of rural communities in Northwest Europe 400–900* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 126.

between the landholders and tenants in late Anglo-Saxon England: *Rectitudines Singularum Personarum*, which records the rights and duties of the people living on an estate (from the *thegn* to the beekeeper), and *Gerefa*, a treatise on the duties of the reeve.¹⁶ These texts provide some information on farming in late Anglo-Saxon England, but more importantly, they underline the role that food played in the relations between various groups of society. This chapter is but a brief overview of the variety of sources that can be used to understand the background of food production and consumption in Anglo-Saxon England.

DIGGING FOR VICTUALS: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Animal husbandry

Unlike most animals, humans have an impact on their environment, and wherever man has settled he has left evidence of his presence in the cultivation of the land and in settlements. Nevertheless, the preservation of organic remains is sometimes haphazard, depending to a large extent on how people disposed of their rubbish (for example, a large proportion of plant remains, such as stalks, husks and nut shells may have been tossed into the fire during cooking), environmental factors, such as the constitution of the soil and the skill of the excavator. Attitudes towards the recovery and preservation of organic remains, as well as the examination and interpretation have undergone great changes in the last fifty years. Nowadays great care is taken to inspect items uncovered for possible organic traces. However, such examinations remain costly and often there are not enough funds to send all objects to the laboratory for testing. On top of this there may be a lack of comparative evidence from previously excavated material.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the technological advances of the last twenty-five years, such as DNA analysis, stable isotope examination or micro-zoological testing, allows us to draw more detailed conclusions.¹⁸

The main providers of meat in northern Europe were domestic animals, since few of the bones found in settlement contexts come from wild animals, which indicates that hunting was not an important source for food provision.¹⁹ Patterns of animal husbandry have changed over time. In the earliest periods of Anglo-

¹⁶ Preserved in a twelfth-century manuscript that also contains Alfred's treaty with Guthrum and a collection of laws (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 383); M. Richards, 'The manuscript context of the Old English laws: tradition and innovation', in: P. Szarmach ed., *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 171–92, at 183.

¹⁷ A. Boddington, 'From bones to population: the problem of numbers', in: A. Boddington, A.N. Garland and R. Janaway eds., *Death, Decay and Reconstruction: approaches to archaeology and forensic science* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 180–97.

¹⁸ A more recent way of examining what people ate involves the detailed analysis of soil samples taken from abdominal areas of skeleton. Even though the digestive tracts have decayed completely, more than 70 per cent of sampled inhumations have yielded data. Unfortunately, no Anglo-Saxon remains have been looked at so far; G. Berg, 'Last meals: recovering abdominal contents from skeletonized remains', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 29:12 (2002), 1349–65.

¹⁹ Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 127.

Saxon England communities would have produced animals mainly for personal consumption. These animals would have provided produce (and also traction in the case of cattle), before becoming part of the food chain. Helena Hamerow suggests that few animals were traded during the early period of settlement,²⁰ and assumes that animals, in particular cattle, were an important commodity of gift-exchanges.²¹ The continuous importance of animals as wealth indicators is evident from charters, which seem to contain more information on animal husbandry than crop management.²² Additional evidence for the importance of animal husbandry comes from East Anglia, which sees a shift towards pastoralism in the early Anglo-Saxon period; in some areas arable fields seem to have been turned into pastures.²³

The animal bone found at the various settlement sites gives insights into the meats available, and their ratio in comparison to the number of humans apparently living at these sites. There are a few caveats to the conclusions that can be drawn from such finds. The minimum number is often not represented and the proportion of different species is calculated on the basis of absolute numbers of bone recovered, which, according to Hamerow, makes it difficult to assess the economic importance of one species for a particular community. Thus cattle are often regarded as the main source of meat, since they account for the greatest number of surviving fragments. However, cattle bones will have been slaughtered only at a relatively advanced age when they could no longer be used for other purposes. Pig bones are underrepresented, since they were killed as soon as they reached full size, and the bones of young animals do not survive as well as those of older beasts.²⁴ Since cattle and sheep bones are also much larger and preserve better than the bones of smaller animals, and since larger beasts may have been taken to markets for slaughter where their waste was added to the rubbish, the bone deposits may be misleading. The large assemblages of bones found at some settlement sites may say less about the meat consumption of the inhabitants than the transactions that took place in their markets. Nevertheless, the comparison of such data may give us some insights into the animal husbandry of the supplying areas (hinterland), since there is a lack of observable structures that could be identified as stables or animal shelters and which could give an indication of the extent of animal husbandry on farms.²⁵

A shift in production seems to have taken place during the eighth century, when a specialisation of production emerged. It seems that farming moved from

²⁰ Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 127. Chris Loveluck, however, thinks that the absence of identifiable trading movement in the seventh century should not be taken as an absence of proof. Loveluck points to Continental sources such as Salian lawcodes and letters of Cassiodorus as evidence for trade; Loveluck, pers. comm.

²¹ Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 126.

²² Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 126. The value of cattle, unlike in Carolingian charters, is not noted; *ibid.*

²³ S. Oosthuizen, 'New light on the origins of open field farming?', *Med Arch* 49 (2005), 165–93, at 187.

²⁴ Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 127–8.

²⁵ T. Capelle, *Archäologie der Angelsachsen: Eigenständigkeit und kontinentale Bindung vom 5. bis 9. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 32.

self-sufficiency to providing for a market in the emerging settlements.²⁶ Evidence for such changes have been found in the excavation of occupation layers at multi-period sites, such as Flixborough in Lincolnshire. It is apparent that Flixborough had a consumer-orientated economy, where different populations can be sharply delineated through their material culture and evidence from food remains.²⁷ This site, which may have started out as a monastic community, shows great changes in the stratification of animal bone from middle Anglo-Saxon contexts in comparison to what is found from the period of Scandinavian settlement and later periods. Here layers from the seventh to mid-eighth century contain mainly cattle bones from large beasts, fish bones, geese and chicken, as well as 'exotic' animals, such as porpoises and bottlenose dolphins, and evidence for the consumption of hunted animals.²⁸ Deposits from around AD 850 onwards show a radical change: evidence for hunted animals and exotic food disappears, cattle consumption reaches a peak, but pig bones decline sharply.²⁹ The change of consumption is mirrored in a transformation of material culture. Finds from early Flixborough suggest that it was a high-status site, possibly a settlement of a North Sea elite, but artefacts from later layers seem to indicate a different population, where craft-workers have replaced elites. The early phase included a large building with internal partitions on a gravel foundation,³⁰ but it seems that this structure and various other buildings were rebuilt in the mid-eighth century.

Any observations drawn from the number of animals found in any one place have to take into consideration that medieval animals yielded less produce than their modern counterparts. Generally, early medieval livestock were 40 to 60 per cent smaller than their modern equivalents and yielded less meat, but their grazing requirements were the same. Medieval chicken produced between 50 and 100 eggs per year in comparison to between 220 and 400 today.³¹ Estimations of medieval yields are based on the size of bones found and descriptions from later periods, before the onset of intensive farming and the use of growth-inducing substances. Bone assemblages may also chart population changes. Pam Crabtree claims that Anglo-Saxon and Romano-British butchery practices varied substantially. Whereas cattle and red deer radii in Roman market towns were chopped through axially, the bones at West Stow show different butchery patterns.³² If butchery practices prove to be reliable indicators for different populations, they

²⁶ H. Hamerow ed., *Excavations at Mucking*, vol. 2: *The Anglo-Saxon settlement* (London: English Heritage in association with British Museum Press, 1993), 149–50.

²⁷ C. Loveluck, 'Wealth, waste and conspicuous consumption: Flixborough and its importance for Middle and Late Saxon Rural settlement studies', in: H. Hamerow and A. McGregor eds., *Image and Power in the Archaeology of Early Medieval Britain: essays in honour of Rosemary Cramp* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 78–130. The excavation of this site has yielded 250,000 bones.

²⁸ Loveluck, 'Conspicuous consumption', 92–3.

²⁹ Loveluck, 'Conspicuous consumption', 96.

³⁰ Loveluck, 'Conspicuous consumption', 85.

³¹ K. Pearson, 'Nutrition and the early-medieval diet', *Speculum* 72 (1997), 1–32, at 16.

³² P. Crabtree, 'Animal exploitation in East Anglian villages', in: J. Rackham ed., *Environment and Economy in Anglo-Saxon England: a review of recent work on the environmental archaeology of rural and urban Anglo-Saxon settlements in England*, CBA Research Report 89 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1994), 40–54, at 43.

may help to understand patterns of migration in early Anglo-Saxon England. However, too few bones have been systematically examined so far to draw general conclusions. Comparisons with Continental sites, such as Feddersen Wierde in Friesland or Vorbasse in Denmark, are inconclusive since currently only few Anglo-Saxon sites have been examined in the same detail.³³

The excavated animal bone seems to indicate that in general cattle rearing was preferred to keeping pigs or sheep, but there are regional and chronological differences. Bearing in mind that cattle and sheep require substantial amounts of grazing land, whereas pigs are foragers, and goats and poultry can be kept in smaller pens and therefore need less space, the predominant species may be determined by the land available for pasture.³⁴ There are hardly any sheep bones found at the early Anglo-Saxon site at Yeavering (Northumberland) but at the tenth-century site at Cheddar (Somerset) sheep bones were the third largest number of animal remains found. Both Yeavering and Cheddar were high-status sites and seem to have been royal centres. The variance in the predominant species is related either to regional difference of land use or the fact that a change in the preferred animal has taken place. Reasons for the predominance of sheep in late Anglo-Saxon England may have included the fact that they are multi-purpose animals and are not only a source for milk and meat, but also had growing importance for textile production.³⁵ Finds suggest that sheep became the more popular species much earlier in the east of England.³⁶ For example, at the early Anglo-Saxon village of West Stow (Suffolk), an increase in the sheep population, with a corresponding decrease of pig remains, has been observed as early as the sixth century.³⁷ Pam Crabtree suggests that once the settlement at West Stow was fully established, pigs may have declined in importance because of a limit in available forest land.³⁸

Different communities apparently had different needs. At West Stow cattle seem to have been killed young but at Wicken Bonhunt (Essex) only a few cattle appear to have been killed in the first year.³⁹ These differences could indicate that

³³ Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 149.

³⁴ Pearson, 'Early-medieval diet', 7. An average of 1.5–2.0 hectares per cow is needed and 0.66–1.66 hectares per sheep; *ibid.*, 16.

³⁵ S. Payne, 'Animal husbandry', in: M. Lapidge, J. Blair, S. Keynes and D. Scragg, eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 38–9.

³⁶ Hagen, *A Second Handbook*, 119.

³⁷ A total of 48.3 percent of bones were from sheep/goats in contrast to 33.7 percent from cattle and 16.7 percent from pigs; Crabtree, 'Animal exploitation', 41.

³⁸ *West Stow, Suffolk: early Anglo-Saxon animal husbandry*, EAA Archaeological Report 47 (Ipswich: Suffolk County Planning Department, 1989), 16. Pigs remained a standard part of the Anglo-Saxon diet. Evidence for this comes not only from excavated bones, but also from texts. For example, the writer of the anonymous *Old English Martyrology* is at some pains to explain why the food laws of the Old Testament prohibit the eating of pork when he comments on the apocryphal *The Maccabees: Antiochus, se oferhydiga cyning, nydde hi* [the Maccabees] *þæt hi æten swynen flæsc; þæt wæs Godes folce forboden on Æare ealdan æ, ac hit Crist eft geclænsode þurh his tocyme*, 'Antiochus, the proud king, forced them to eat pig's meat, that was forbidden to God's people under the Old Law, but Christ afterwards made it clean with his coming'; G. Kotzor ed., *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, Abhandlungen der bayrischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse 88, 1–2, 2 vols (Munich: Beck, 1981), 165.

³⁹ Crabtree, 'Animal exploitation', 47.

cattle at West Stow were bred for sale or as part of food supplies. Wicken Bonhunt was a royal farm and may have served as a collection centre for food rents paid in kind, which would explain the high percentage of market-age animals.⁴⁰ The site held a low number of sheep remains, but a very high number of pig bones.⁴¹ Such differences in species types at various sites may point to different economies: an abundance of sheep may indicate a burgeoning textile industry, and pig and cattle bones may be indicators of taxation paid to a royal manor.⁴²

The recovery of animal bones found at Anglo-Saxon settlements has provided some astonishing figures. Up to 1987 175,000 animal bones had been recovered from West Stow, while from the slightly later village of Wicken Bonhunt 36,000 bones had been identified, and from the middle Saxon urban site of Ipswich, Suffolk, 19,000 bones had been recovered.⁴³ These animals were taken there from the hinterland on the hoof, to be sold and butchered on site, as suggested by evidence from Hamwic (Hampshire), which was established around the year 700 on the banks of the River Itchen and is the precursor of modern Southampton.⁴⁴ The aging of the bone remains seems to indicate that the beasts sold in these places had a previous life as plough animals, since many cattle remains found in wics, such as York, Ipswich (Suffolk) and Hamwic, are beyond the prime market age. Hamerow suggests that this observation, as well as the limited range of other bone evidence (from domestic and wild animals), implies that settlements were supplied, at least partly, through food renders.⁴⁵ As a result there are observable differences in the distribution of species between town and country.

The proportion of identified bone that came from cattle at the villages of West Stow and Wickham Bonhunt was 33.7 and 17.3 percent respectively, whereas at the urban sites of Thetford, Brandon Road (tenth century) and Norwich St Martin (tenth–eleventh century) the percentages were 47.4 and 40.3.⁴⁶ Such increases are conspicuous, even if we consider that there are chronological discrepancies and the higher urban population would have obviously increased the demand. These figures indicate that towns in the late Anglo-Saxon period were well supplied and that their inhabitants were able to afford meat produce. Small animals, such as chicken and other fowl, may have been kept by the inhabitants of towns in their backyards and were possibly not part of the economic exchange.

The excavations at Melbourne Street at Hamwic have revealed around 75,000 animal bone fragments from five find spots. The layers from which they were recovered represent about one hundred and fifty years of settlement archaeology. Most of the bones found were from cattle and sheep, with a few from pigs, and small amounts from fowl or geese. The bones indicate that domestic animals at

⁴⁰ Crabtree, 'Animal exploitation', 50.

⁴¹ Crabtree, 'Symbolic role of animals', 24, fig. 2.

⁴² J. Mulville and K. Ayres, 'Animal bone', in: Hey ed., *Yarnton*, 325–50, at 350.

⁴³ Crabtree, 'Animal exploitation', 40–1.

⁴⁴ J. Bourdillon, 'The animal provision of Saxon Southampton', in: Rackham ed., *Environment and Economy*, 121–5.

⁴⁵ Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 149.

⁴⁶ Crabtree, 'Animal exploitation', 41.

Hamwic were plentiful and also quite sturdy and large. Butchery marks reveal that the meat was roughly divided into large chunks and that all of the body was used.⁴⁷

A number of bones have not been recovered from domestic waste deposits, such as middens or pits, but found inside structures of settlements. At the early Anglo-Saxon settlement site at Mucking (Essex) animal bone was found as debris in 183 of the total 203 *Grubenhäuser*, 'sunken floor buildings'. These would have possibly been disposed of there once the primary function of the building had ceased, but it is not clear why the people of Mucking reused *Grubenhäuser* as rubbish pits. Cattle bones here were recovered from 133 buildings and outnumbered all other residues. Sheep bones were found in 62 houses, and pig and horse remains were discovered in 57 buildings.⁴⁸ It appears that the population at Mucking favoured cattle, but we cannot be sure that all of these were reared for their produce – they could also have served as plough animals, which, of course, would at some stage have ended up in the food chain. Bones were poorly preserved owing to the acidity of the subsoil, which makes the detection of butchery marks very difficult.⁴⁹ At the middle Anglo-Saxon settlement of Maxey (Cambridgeshire) 36 percent of bones came from cattle and the same percentage from goats and/or sheep,⁵⁰ 11 percent from pigs and the rest from other animals, including horses. At Cassington (Oxfordshire), cattle bones made up 52 percent of animal bones found, pigs 29 percent and sheep 14 percent; at Crossgates (Yorkshire), cattle bones were 60 percent of the bone assemblage, followed by horse bones (30 percent) and pig bones (10 percent).⁵¹

The recently excavated site of Yarnton (Oxfordshire) provides a detailed example for changes in agricultural patterns.⁵² The settlement of this site overlays prehistoric and Roman activity, and it seems to have been continuously inhabited from the early to the late Anglo-Saxon period, though the outlines of the community and the patterns of agriculture changed considerably over this time.⁵³ Significant numbers of animal bones were found on site and the total number of stock was calculated from the bones present: 366 cattle, 191 sheep or goat, 11 sheep, 1 goat, 90 pigs and 46 horses.⁵⁴ For many identified bones gnawing or butchery marks were recorded.⁵⁵ Cattle were the most abundant species, with over 50 percent representation in all periods of occupation. However, the chronological comparison of the number of cattle remains shows a decrease over time and sheep/goat becomes more popular.⁵⁶

Occasionally a piece of butchered horse bone is among the recovered bone.

⁴⁷ Bourdillon, 'Animal provision', 121.

⁴⁸ Hamerow ed., *Excavations at Mucking 2*, 74–7.

⁴⁹ Hamerow, *Excavations at Mucking 2*, ibid.

⁵⁰ They can be difficult to tell apart.

⁵¹ Capelle, *Archäologie*, 44–5.

⁵² Hey ed., *Yarnton*.

⁵³ A. Bayliss and G. Hey, 'Scientific dating', in: Hey ed., *Yarnton*, 255–66, at 263.

⁵⁴ Mulville and Ayres, 'Animal bone', 325.

⁵⁵ Mulville and Ayres, 'Animal bone', 330.

⁵⁶ Mulville and Ayres, 'Animal bone', 345.

The custom of eating horseflesh appears to have been widespread in early medieval Northern Europe. Evidence comes from an eighth-century letter by Pope Gregory II to Boniface, which advises the missionary on how to approach this issue with his newly converted flock.⁵⁷ Horse meat was without doubt also consumed by the early Anglo-Saxons, but it should be considered that this may have been a special 'treat', since horses have clear associations with status in burial rites, particularly when deposited as whole animals. The inhumations of complete animals at Lakenheath (Cambridgeshire), Snape (Suffolk), Great Chesterford (Essex) and a comparable horse burial from Beckum (North-Rhine Westphalia, Germany) all occur within the context of male graves that have overt martial connotations. The animals, some of which had riding accoutrements, such as bridles and stirrups, were buried in the vicinity of the body, which seem to represent aspect of hunting or lordly life. Other insignia of lordship, as will be discussed below, are represented through feasting gear. Horse meat may have attained a special status as an elite food stuff that was consumed on special occasions. Butchered or chopped animals often occur in the contexts of buildings, rather than rubbish pits.⁵⁸ After the Conversion church authorities tried to undermine this habit, as the rebuttal by the papal legates George and Theophactylus at the Council of Celchyth (Chelsea) shows.⁵⁹ The horse meat, which so much repelled the foreign dignitaries, may have been a token of appreciation by those who organised the meeting.

Hunting played a lesser role in the provision of meat at Maxey, which corresponds to finds from Hamwic, where little food was drawn from the wild and, surprisingly for a settlement so close to the sea, even the fish bone assemblage was not very varied.⁶⁰ The finds of fish bones have been rather limited at early Anglo-Saxon sites.⁶¹ While some of this may be a function of the nature of fish bone, which can easily be overlooked, even those sites where careful sieving was undertaken have revealed disappointing numbers. At Yarnton, for example, only a single eel bone was discovered, and this may even have been an intrusion.⁶² James Barrett, Alison Locker and Callum Roberts, who have looked at the fish bone evidence from 127 English assemblages dated to 600–1600, have shown that there is a difference in the fish consumption between the middle and late Anglo-Saxon period. Prior to the eleventh century most of the modest assemblages have come from freshwater fish. After this period the most common species are herring and other marine fish.⁶³

The choice of fish available appears to have been much wider in late

⁵⁷ R. Rau ed. and trans., *Briefe des Bonifatius: Willibalds Leben des Bonifatius nebst einigen zeitgenössischen Dokumenten*, Freiherr-vom-Stein-Gedächtnisausgabe 4 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 100.

⁵⁸ For examples, see Mulville and Ayres, 'Animal bone', 342 and 348.

⁵⁹ A. Haddan and W. Stubbs eds., *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1871), 3, 459.

⁶⁰ Bourdillon, 'Animal provision', 122.

⁶¹ Barrett, Locker and Roberts, '“Dark Age Economics” revisited', 621.

⁶² Mulville and Ayres, 'Animal bone', 345.

⁶³ Barrett, Locker and Roberts, '“Dark Age Economics” revisited', 621.

Anglo-Saxon England, where we have evidence for fish farming. Weirs have been found at a number of river sites, such as Colwick (Nottinghamshire) and Castle Donington (Leicestershire).⁶⁴ The variety of fish that may have been available in late Anglo-Saxon England is indicated in a Latin teaching text of the early eleventh century. The fisherman of Ælfric's *Colloquy*, a Latin teaching text that was possibly written for the pupils at Cerne Abbas, where the writer lived between 987 and 1002, and which was augmented by Ælfric Bata, boasts that he sells eels, pike, minnows, turbot, trout, salmon, lampreys and 'whatever swims in the water' to the citizens of the town, where the demand outstrips his supplies. Unusually, the fisherman does not only catch freshwater fish but also goes out to sea, to catch 'herrings, porpoises and sturgeon, oysters and crabs, mussels, winkles, cockles, plaice and flounders and lobsters'.⁶⁵ This large repertoire of both freshwater and saltwater fish, as well as crustaceans, however, represents the generic choice available, rather than the average offering of Anglo-Saxon fishmongers.

Crops and cereals

The main component of the Anglo-Saxons' diet, however, was not meat, fish or fowl, but milk produce, crops and cereals. The ready supply of meat may have been associated with high status, which is important when we consider that it is the predominant food stuff found with Anglo-Saxon burials. Nevertheless, careful analysis of graves has revealed that grain is occasionally found with inhumations.⁶⁶ The question remains whether grains were deliberate offerings⁶⁷ or accidental intrusions from surrounding threshing or grain storage.

Evidence for grain types can be derived from carbonised or mineralised pollen and seed samples that have survived in the soil.⁶⁸ During the eighth century the main crops were bread cereals, in particular barley, which is one of the most resilient plants and can be used for baking as well as brewing beer. During the early medieval period the cultivation of barley declined all over Northern Europe in favour of rye, which tolerates wetter climates and sandy soils, which may be the reason for the preponderance of this crop. In England rye may have also been made popular by Scandinavian settlers, since it rarely occurs in the late Saxon

⁶⁴ C.R. Salisbury, 'Primitive British fishweirs', in: G.L. Good, R.H. Jones and M.W. Ponsford eds., *Waterfront Archaeology: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Waterfront Archaeology*, Bristol 1989, CBA Research Report 74 (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1991), 76–87.

⁶⁵ G.N. Garmonsway ed., *Ælfric's Colloquy* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1978), 26–30. The *Colloquy* was originally written to improve the Latin of young monks, but one of the surviving four manuscripts has a continuous Old English interlinear gloss (BL Cotton Tiberius A.iii, fols 60v–64v).

⁶⁶ E. O'Brian, *Post-Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England: burial practice reviewed*, BAR British Series 289 (1999), 55.

⁶⁷ Representing, for example, bread. Loaves have been found in several of the Viking Age inhumations at Birka in Sweden: Bengt Wigh, *Birka: Excavations in the Black Earth 1990–95: animal husbandry in the Viking age town and its hinterland*, Birka Studies 7 (Stockholm: Birka Project for Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2001).

⁶⁸ Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 137.

towns of Wessex, but is found regularly in the Danelaw.⁶⁹ Other cereals, such as wheat, emmer, millet and oats, were used for bread-making purposes, so that by the ninth century barley was primarily used for brewing.⁷⁰

Apart from cereals, vegetables, beans, herbs and fruit seemed to have been cultivated.⁷¹ The distribution of seed plants could vary according to the soil type. Oats, for example, can grow in very poor soil and in damper weather than other cereal crops. Wheat is susceptible to high winds, but tends to yield a high ratio of harvested grains for each seed sown, and its gluten content makes it the best grain for baking bread.⁷² Comparisons of farming methods within Anglo-Saxon England, according to Helena Hamerow, are difficult because of the paucity of excavated settlements so far.⁷³

The communities of Yarnton and neighbouring Cresswell Field and Worton have been studied in detail. Yarnton seems to have had a hiatus between Roman and early Anglo-Saxon occupation, but small-scale farming may have continued. During the early Anglo-Saxon period there seems to be reuse of Roman field patterns, with some of the land left fallow.⁷⁴ The bone assemblage from domestic animals is meagre and buildings are small and short-lived. Evidence for pasture (through grass seeds), as well as wheat, oats and flax cultivation, was apparent in the sixth- and seventh-century soil samples.⁷⁵ During the eighth century a different picture emerges: fields are clearly delineated through boundaries and a wider variety of crops are grown. Apart from barley, wheat, rye, emmer and flax, there is evidence for oats, lentils, grapes and plums from this period. Free-threshing wheat is the most important cereal by the ninth century, and winter fodder for herds of animals is derived from hay meadows. The variety of plants grown may have been the result of a decline in soil fertility.⁷⁶ At the same time the settlement, which was dispersed in the earliest period, seems to attain a coherent character. The nucleation of villages and the reorganisation of farmland results in greater efficiency, since it allowed groups of people to cultivate the land, rather than individual farms producing mainly for their own needs.⁷⁷

This change in agriculture has been observed in other places in the river valleys of the southern Midlands.⁷⁸ Susan Oosthuizen has recently observed that open field farming seems to have superseded earlier forms of agriculture in this region around AD 850.⁷⁹ The ninth century sees an extension of cultivated land, which is indicated through an increase in crop growing, and Oosthuizen

⁶⁹ Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 153.

⁷⁰ Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 153.

⁷¹ See, for example, F. Green, 'Cereals and plant food: a reassessment of the Saxon economic evidence from Wessex', in: Rackham ed., *Environment and Economy*, 83–8.

⁷² Pearson, 'Early-medieval diet', 4.

⁷³ Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 147; she writes that there are still very few faunal remains recovered from settlements.

⁷⁴ G. Hey, M. Robinson, J. Munby and P. Booth, 'Settlement and landscape', in: Hey ed., *Yarnton*, 40.

⁷⁵ Hey *et al.*, 'Settlement and landscape', 42–3.

⁷⁶ Hey *et al.*, 'Settlement and landscape', 48–9.

⁷⁷ Hooke, 'Settlement and land use', 97.

⁷⁸ Hey *et al.*, 'Settlement and landscape', 49.

⁷⁹ Oosthuizen, 'Open field farming', 166.

speculates that the significance of cattle as wealth indicators had decreased since the seventh century.⁸⁰ This is an interesting thought, since grain is easier to transport over long distances and the growth of a coin-based industry could have resulted in a shift in emphasis. In other areas the change towards open field farming was a long-drawn-out process, which was not completed before the Norman Conquest.⁸¹ Della Hooke suggests that the reorganisation of the field system was more readily achieved on estates that were held by the king or high-ranking officials.⁸² It is yet unclear where the Anglo-Saxons stored their grain. There is a lack of structures that can be identified as barns or granaries.⁸³ Sunken-floor buildings may have been used for storage purposes in the early period, but for the middle Anglo-Saxon period the existence of purpose-built granaries and even the roof space of a house are assumed to have been used for drying grain.⁸⁴

From the middle Anglo-Saxon period the growing specialisation of farming allows surplus to be sold to emerging markets. For example, a number of settlements at the edge of the fens show specialist livestock rearing. These are only a few kilometres away from high-status sites.⁸⁵ Changing patterns of farming underpin other changes during the long eighth century: the growing concentration of power in larger kingdoms, the rise of the Church and an increasing growth of trade centres can only be sustained through the generation of surplus, since the people occupied in these categories seldom work the land. Such changes also demand a difference in consumption, since food stuffs may be transported to a *wic*, manor or abbey.

This changing landscape may have also impacted on the way in which wealth was distributed after death: if those who benefit from the deceased are no longer living in the immediate neighbourhood, a system of arranging the transfer of goods is essential. Foods, such as joints of meat found traditionally with graves, needs to be consumed quickly, whereas livestock and land could nourish the living for much longer.

The activities of the late Anglo-Saxon farmer are important enough to be depicted in two late Anglo-Saxon calendars (BL, Cotton Julius A.vi and Cotton Tiberius B.v). The Cotton Julius manuscript was illuminated possibly at Christ Church, Canterbury during the early eleventh century, and the Cotton Tiberius manuscript was made a little later at the Old Minster in Winchester. Each month depicts an occupation, and most of them are connected with agriculture, such as ploughing (January), sowing (March) and harvesting (August). It is unlikely that those depicted in the illustrations will have ever had a glimpse at this work, which was meant to aid the reckoning of time in a monastic environment. Mundane activities seldom feature in poetry, but the importance of growing crops is

⁸⁰ Oosthuizen, 'Open field farming', 188.

⁸¹ Hooke, 'Settlement and land use', 97.

⁸² Hooke, 'Settlement and land use', 97.

⁸³ Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 154.

⁸⁴ Stevens and Robinson, 'Plant cultivation', 82–3.

⁸⁵ Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, 149–50.

Feasting the Dead

illustrated in the Old English version *The Phoenix*, preserved in the tenth-century *Exeter Book*. This poem, like the calendar above, is not primarily a work on agriculture, but a parable on the grace of God, who grants resurrection to the faithful. In much the same way as the Phoenix rose from the ashes, the faithful are taken to what appears to be a garden, where neither violent hunger nor thirst can harm them (l. 613). The first 380 lines of the poem are a free reworking of *De ave phoenice*, attributed to the fourth-century Latin poet Lactantius, and the Anglo-Saxon adaptor shows his familiarity with the cycle of the agricultural year:

... sumes onlice
swa mon to ondleoƿne eorðan wæstmas
on hærfeste ham gelædeð
wiste wynsume ær wintres cyme
on rypes timan, þy læs hi renes scur
awyrde under wolcnum; þær hi wraðe metað,
fodorþege gefean, þonne forst ond snaw
mid ofermægne eorþan þeccað
wintergewædum. Of þam wæstmum sceal
eorla eadwela eft alædan
þurh cornes gecynd, þa ær clæne bið
sæd onsawen. þonne sunnan glæm
on lencenne, lifes tacen,
weceð woruldgestreon, þæt þa wæstmas beoð
þurh agne gecynd eft acende,
foldan frætwe.⁸⁶

EVIDENCE FROM GRAVES

You are what you eat: physiological features as evidence for diet-related diseases

The human skeleton is not unlike a history book, where accidents are recorded in form of fractures, where decay marks the years and strains on the body, where diseases, such as tuberculosis or leprosy, alter the structure and where the absence or presence of food and water leave signatures that can no longer be erased. Each skeletal story is individual. For example, the lack of nourishment is at the root of many diseases, but not everyone will be affected. Some illnesses are caused by genetic disposition; for example, only persons with black ancestors can develop sickle-cell anaemia. Many genetic changes happen during assimilation to a particular environment and are caused by a transcription error (mutation) in the

⁸⁶ ASPR 3, 101, ll. 242a–57a:

‘In somewhat the same way as people carry home for food the fruits of the earth, pleasant nourishment, in autumn at reaping-time, before the winter’s advent, lest the pelting of the rain destroy them below the clouds, wherein they find sustenance, the joy of eating, when frost and snow with overwhelming might bedeck the earth in wintry vestments, from which fruits the abundant prosperity of men shall sprout forth again according to the nature of the corn which is first sown as pure seed, when the gleam of the sun, the sign of life, in spring brings forth the world’s wealth, so that according to their proper nature these fruits are born again, the adornment of the earth’; trans. Bradley, 291.

genetic code. For example, recent tests have shown that many Chinese people lack the ability to metabolise alcohol efficiently. Some diseases are caused through metabolic imbalances, such as the inability to digest certain food stuffs (such as diabetes), others are either the result of too much or of too little food. Sometimes diseases can be the result of a body weakened through excessive or insufficient nourishment. Some pathology, however, is difficult to interpret. Rheumatoid arthritis is virtually unknown until late Anglo-Saxon times (though osteoarthritis is widespread), but occurrence of periostitis (an inflammation of the thin tissue that covers the bone) is high, in some populations affecting up to 25 percent of people.⁸⁷

Examination of teeth has proved to be a valuable means of establishing the quality of Anglo-Saxon nutrition. Abrasions on the teeth contain information about the diet of a population, which can vary between different sites. Heavy deposits of tartar often indicate a diet rich in soft foods, which have a high carbohydrate content.⁸⁸ The dental remains at the cemetery of Castledyke South (East Lincolnshire) dated to the fifth to seventh centuries, for example, showed that the majority of people had enjoyed a good diet. There is evidence in the relatively slight wearing of teeth in comparison to results from other sites that cereals were efficiently ground, so that no large and coarse inclusions remained in the flour, which would grind on the molars. The rates of calculus (tartar) formation on the teeth were similar to those found at other sites of the same period. The frequency of such deposits indicates that the diet was non-abrasive in nature.⁸⁹ Teeth erosion at Worthy Park (Hampshire) shows a strong use of the jaws from an early age on, which, together with a lack of tartar, points to a diet rich in meat.⁹⁰

The occurrence of caries at Castledyke was comparative to other early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, and mainly confined to the native population: the teeth of children show hardly any erosion.⁹¹ Female skeletons at Castledyke had a higher rate of enamel hypoplasia than males. The condition is related to the lack of vitamins A, C and D in the diet, but also to infectious diseases or trauma, and manifests itself in lines or pits on the tooth enamel. Since teeth are fully formed before adulthood (after which changes are only due to decay), they are particularly useful for the study of stress or illness patterns in childhood. The high rate of enamel hypoplasia at Worthy Park (53 out of 59 skeletons showed evidence for this condition), has been explained by Calvin Wells as evidence for rapid transition from breast milk to solids at an early age.⁹² Breast milk contains natural anti-

⁸⁷ K. Manchester, 'Skeletal evidence for health and disease', in: Boddington *et al.*, *Death, Decay and Reconstruction*, 169–79, at 163–4.

⁸⁸ C. Wells, in: S. Chadwick Hawkes with G. Grainger eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Worthy Park, Kingsworthy, near Winchester, Hampshire* (Oxford: Oxford School of Archaeology, 2003), 164.

⁸⁹ A. Boylston, R. Wiggins and C. Roberts, 'Human skeletal remains', in: G. Drinkall and M. Foreman eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Castledyke South, Barton-on-Humber*, Sheffield Excavation Report 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 227–9 and 235.

⁹⁰ C. Wells, G. Grainger and B. Denston, 'Dental disease', in: Chadwick Hawkes and Grainger eds., *Worthy Park, Kingsworthy*, 163.

⁹¹ Wells, Grainger and Denston, 'Dental disease', 163.

⁹² Wells, Grainger and Denston, 'Dental disease', 163.

bodies and nutrients, which may help mitigate the impact of childhood diseases and problems associated with teething.

Female mortality at Castledyke and Edix Hill (Barrington A, Cambridgeshire) is high in early adulthood (18–25 years), which corresponds to the average time of the first pregnancy. Death in childbirth or from complications in pregnancy was the single biggest cause of death for women until the twentieth century,⁹³ so that the median life expectancy of women in early Anglo-Saxon England was only 33.1 years in contrast to 34.7 years for men.⁹⁴ This rate was calculated by Don Brothwell on the basis of adults only.⁹⁵ In the middle Anglo-Saxon period these figures rise to 35.8 and 38.2 years respectively.⁹⁶ Death in childbirth must have also been a contributor to the high numbers of young women among the late Anglo-Saxon dead: 71 percent of women at the mid-tenth- to twelfth-century cemetery at Raunds Furnells died between the ages of 17 and 35.⁹⁷ On average there is no disparity between the life expectancy of men and women in the sixth and seventh century.⁹⁸ There are slight variations, such as a lower female life span at Edix Hill,⁹⁹ but it seems that once childhood diseases, childbearing or early adulthood were overcome, there was a good chance to live to an age of maturity.

Not all complications that may occur with childbirth are a consequence of the lack of surgical facilities or inferior hygiene. Kathy Pearson states that the excess fibre content of the early medieval diet could have been a problem for the very young, elderly, pregnant and lactating women, since this would block the

⁹³ We have an indication for Anglo-Saxon obstetrics. Medical texts, such as an entry in the *Herbarium of Apuleius*, or a remedy found in the *Herbarium* (which essentially uses the same Latin source), suggest certain plants, such as coriander or henbane, to assist a mother who is suffering an obstructed birth; A. Meaney, 'Woman, witchcraft and magic'; D.G. Scragg ed., *Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 1989), 9–40, at 23–4. A passage in BL Ms Cotton Tiberius A.iii, which is a manuscript containing a number of prognostics, prayers and homilies, includes a section on the formation of the foetus, explaining that if the child is overdue it will kill the mother; O. Cockayne ed. and trans., *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft* 3, Rolls Series 35 (London: Longman, 1865), 146.

⁹⁴ Figures can be misleading: they are achieved by adding all the data and deducing the median age. Since many women died young, the considerable percentage of elderly women at early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries may thus be easily overlooked. The comparatively low numbers of post-Conversion sites makes it difficult to gather the same amount of data for the late Anglo-Saxon period, but evidence so far seems to indicate a slight deterioration of health and life expectancy during this period.

⁹⁵ H. Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon social structure', in: J. Hines ed., *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: an ethnographic perspective* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), 125–70, at 135.

⁹⁶ Once all bones in the body have fused (around the age of 30), age determination becomes very difficult. Usually tooth abrasions are taken as one indicator, since the older the person the more worn the teeth will be. We should, however, consider that in the Middle Ages much teeth erosion is caused by a diet which contains coarse bread (with residues from the millstone and other abrasives). I am not quite convinced that these figures are absolutely accurate.

⁹⁷ F. Powell, 'The human remains', in: A. Boddington ed., *Raunds Furnells: The Anglo-Saxon church and churchyard*, English Heritage Archaeological Report 7 (London: English Heritage, 1996), 113–24, at 114.

⁹⁸ J. Hines, 'Lies, damned lies, and a curriculum vitae: reflections on statistics and the population of early Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemeteries', in: S. Lucy and A. Reynolds eds., *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales* (London: Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2002), 88–102, at 98.

⁹⁹ Hines, 'Lies, damned lies', 97.

absorption of micronutrients and lead to malnutrition. She calculates that a diet of 500 grams of whole-grain bread and 100 grams of legumes would lead to the consumption of 40–60 grams of fibre per day, which is roughly the equivalent obtained from eating a 500 gram box of modern Shredded Wheat.¹⁰⁰ Any fibre consumed in excess of 35 grams per day may lead to the leaching of nutrients from the gastrointestinal tract. Pregnant and lactating women also need higher supplies of calories, protein, vitamins A, D, B12 and C, thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, calcium and folic acid than men. If their diet consisted mainly of grains, legumes and root vegetables they lacked adequate supplies of protein, calcium, vitamins B12 and C and folic acid. The high amounts of *spina bifida occulta* that have been observed in the skeletons from some early medieval cemeteries may have been the result of a lack of folic acid during pregnancy.¹⁰¹

Any prolonged physical activity will leave marks on the bones. Early Anglo-Saxon skeletons show evidence of hard physical labour, which is evident as stress on the bones. An overall analysis of patterns of disease and bone wear is still outstanding for the Anglo-Saxon period,¹⁰² but certain skeletal features, such as DISH (Diffuse Idiopathic Skeletal Hyperostosis), which results in the abnormal growth of coarse osteophytes on the lower vertical bodies of the spine, are an indication for a diet rich in fat and for prolonged obesity. This disease has also been linked with the onset of mature diabetes, and the condition is more common in men than in women. The result is a gradual spinal fixation and a limitation of joint movements. DISH has been attested in the Middle Ages, especially in burials of monks in the later medieval period, but also occasionally in Anglo-Saxons.¹⁰³ At Edix Hill two of the skeletons showed evidence for DISH. One was a 35- to 45-year-old male in Grave 50, buried with a knife, ring, buckle loop and spearhead; the other was a mature male in Grave 111, buried with a buckle and spearhead. Neither of them had a particularly grand funeral, but, according to Corinne Duhig, this may be related to their age rather than their status. She also warns that a high calorific intake may not be restricted to the rich.¹⁰⁴ This may be certainly true today when high levels of obesity are more likely to be found in the poorer parts of Western populations, but I would argue that the high intake of saturated fat and short-chain carbohydrates, which are apparently necessary for the development of this condition, is mainly found in refined foods, which indicates that the men at Barrington were well-nourished members of society, who had access to a rich diet at all times.

One of the most exciting current developments in research on skeletal material

¹⁰⁰ Pearson, 'Early-medieval diet', 15.

¹⁰¹ In contrast to the open form of *spina bifida* this deformation is only visible on the skeleton and usually does not cause any discomfort.

¹⁰² Sally Crawford's forthcoming monograph on disease in Anglo-Saxon England will redress this need. A significant contribution to the debate on attitudes towards disability in the high and late medieval period is Irina Metzler's *Disability in Medieval Europe: thinking about physical impairment during the High Middle Ages, c. 1100–1400* (London: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁰³ T. Waldron, 'DISH at Merton Priory: evidence for a "new" occupational disease?', *British Medical Journal* 291 (1985), 1762–3.

¹⁰⁴ C. Duhig, 'The human skeletal material', in: Malim and Hines eds., *Edix Hil*, 170.

is the measuring of carbon and nitrogen isotopes in bone material. Previously only the absence of food could be measured.¹⁰⁵ Harris lines on the long bones, *cribra orbitalia* or the deformation of bone owing to rickets could all indicate malnourishment.¹⁰⁶ Stable isotopes are preserved as a readable signature of our diet on the bones, since the intake of food leaves a long-lasting signature in the bone tissue (in contrast to liver tissue, which is metabolically more active).¹⁰⁷ Plants grown in a hot climate, for example, tend to have one more oxygen isotope attached to a carbon molecule (C₄ instead of C₃).¹⁰⁸ A human body growing up on a diet of C₃ will incorporate this information in its skeletal tissue. The readings of nitrogen isotopes are different between meat-eating populations and vegetarians; similarly the carbon readings of people who consume mainly seafood are different from those who eat less of it.

Isotope analysis has been used by Mike Richards to analyse bones from Roman cemeteries, and has revealed that Iron Age and Early Roman populations at Dorchester ate mostly cattle and plants. Two of the samples had very high carbon readings, and it is assumed that the people involved came to Britain from a different place with a warmer climate, such as Greece. This method has been applied to establish dietary differences between Mesolithic and Neolithic cultures,¹⁰⁹ and recently a study of stable isotope analysis has been undertaken on skeletal remains from the sixth-century Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Berinsfield (Oxfordshire).¹¹⁰ These examinations have shown that the population at this site consumed animal protein on a regular basis. The results from the isotope analysis were compared with wealth categories in material culture. It was suggested that the poor at Berinsfield ate more aquatic food and omnivore protein,¹¹¹ whereas skeletons from wealthier burials had signatures indicating a higher consumption of 'herbivore' animals (such as cattle) and dairy produce. Interestingly, men aged over 30 consumed the same food stuffs as people in the 'poorer' category.¹¹²

The results from isotope analysis in the early Middle Ages allows such comparisons of eating patterns with the spread of material culture, or even place names, to get a clearer understanding of different groups of population. Recently James Barrett has applied the investigation of animal remains to the study of

¹⁰⁵ T. Waldron, 'The effects of urbanisation on human health: the evidence from skeletal remains', in: D. Serjeantson and T. Waldron eds., *Diet and Craft in Towns: the evidence of animal remains from the Roman to the post-medieval periods*, BAR British Series 199 (Oxford, 1989), 55–73.

¹⁰⁶ However, these should not be sought in isolation from other factors, since, for example, *cribra orbitalia* also appears regularly in leprosy skeletons, but may also be caused by parasite infection.

¹⁰⁷ K. Privat, T. O'Connell and M. Richards, 'Stable isotope analysis of human and faunal remains from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Berinsfield, Oxfordshire: dietary and social implications', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 29 (2002), 779–90, at 780.

¹⁰⁸ Privat, O'Connell and Richards, 'Stable isotope analysis', 781.

¹⁰⁹ M.P. Richards and R.E.M. Hedges, 'A Neolithic revolution? New evidence of diet in the British Neolithic', *Antiquity* 73 (1999), 891–7.

¹¹⁰ Privat, O'Connell and Richards, 'Stable isotope analysis'.

¹¹¹ Privat, O'Connell and Richards, 'Stable isotope analysis', 786; omnivore animals are pigs, for example, but the authors found that samples taken from the animal bone suggest that Berinsfield pigs were fed on a diet of pannage and acorns/beechnuts; 785.

¹¹² Privat, O'Connell and Richards, 'Stable isotope analysis', 787.

ethnicity in Viking Age Scotland.¹¹³ Barrett and his team have examined the amount of fish bones in the middens, and shown that the arrival of the Norse settlers coincides with a rise of fish consumption. Barrett has observed that evidence from isotope and radiocarbon analyses suggests a gender difference in the consumption of maritime foods in Orkney, where men took on eating fish earlier and more frequently.¹¹⁴ There is no gender bias in the evidence from Berinsfield, where virtually identical readings have been taken from male and female skeletons.¹¹⁵ However, Karen Privat and Tamsin O'Connell concede that isotope analysis is unable to distinguish between animal protein and that of secondary source, such as dairy produce.¹¹⁶

It remains to be seen whether the Anglo-Saxons had different eating patterns from their neighbours. Discussions of ethnicity in the early Middle Ages have rightly been accompanied by cautionary remarks of late, but on occasion the late Anglo-Saxons themselves used food and eating habits to stereotype others. In a fragment of an anonymous letter preserved in Oxford (Bodleian Ms Hatton 115, fol. 60v–1), the author complains about the habit of 'country women' of having a feast on the toilet, where they: *wyllað oft drincan and furpon etan fullice*, 'where they will often drink and continue to eat in a foul manner'.¹¹⁷ In contrast to the usual coyness of Anglo-Saxon writers about detailing bodily functions, this is a crude depiction of women eating and defecating, while getting inebriated on ale and the stench of their own excrement. The letter, which was preserved in a twelfth-century collection of Ælfrician writings from Worcester, should be understood as a diatribe against people of the Danelaw. These northern lassies are not the only ones that are castigated for their eating habits, drinking and overeating are habitually used to portray moral defectiveness in Anglo-Saxon literature.

WRITTEN SOURCES

The examples of Ælfric's *Colloquy* and the *Phoenix* cited above show that food provision makes an occasional appearance in Old English literature. However, such references are quite random and are an inadequate source of evidence for food and provisions in Anglo-Saxon England. If at all concerned with mundane activities, such literary texts were written for a small part of the population and the food stuffs depicted are likely to be limited in range. Nevertheless, there is some information on the eating habits of certain groups within the Anglo-Saxon population. Monasteries adhered to rules, which were supposed to guide and regulate the lives of the monks and nuns, and this included meal times, fast days and foods that could be consumed on these occasions. Monasticism developed in the fourth century from small Egyptian and Palestinian communities that were

¹¹³ Barrett, Beukens and Nichol森, 'Diet and ethnicity'.

¹¹⁴ J. Barrett and M.P. Richards, 'Identity, gender, religion and economy: new isotope and radiocarbon evidence for marine resource identification in early historic Orkney, Scotland', *European Journal of Archaeology* 7 (2004), 249–71, at 264.

¹¹⁵ Privat, O'Connell and Richards, 'Stable isotope analysis', 786.

¹¹⁶ Privat, O'Connell and Richards, 'Stable isotope analysis', 786.

¹¹⁷ F. Kluge, 'Fragment eines angelsächsischen Briefes', *Englische Studien* 8 (1885), 62.

committed to an ascetic lifestyle. The members of such institutions, according to patristic sources, were grown men, who had chosen a life of abstinence in order to praise God. Some of the habits of such communities were transmitted to the Anglo-Saxon audience via translations of saints' lives, such as the *Vita* of Mary of Egypt, which had an Old English adaptation.¹¹⁸ With the expansion of monasticism in the European West from the sixth century onwards, monasteries were no longer inhabited just by adults: children and adolescents, too, were part of religious communities. Since a growing child needs a nutritious diet, monastic rules began to contain exceptions for the pre-pubescent, but also for the infirm and elderly members.

The second type of written source that can give us insights into how food provision was administered in Anglo-Saxon England is legal documentation. This includes regulations for taxation, lists of who should receive what and when, and wills. Such evidence clearly show that food was not merely the means of sustenance but, from the earliest time onwards, part of an exchange mechanism. Those in power could demand food as taxes and those who were dependent received food as payment. Such patterns of provision and distribution are the basis of much of the feasting and feeding imagery in Old English literature.

MONASTIC RULES AS A SOURCE FOR THE DIET OF MONKS

Monastic rules were intended to establish a uniform way of life for religious men and women, and mainly concerned observance and prayer. There were numerous monastic rules, and not all of them contain information on food or eating. The earliest rules, such as the fifth-century *Rule of Augustine* and the sixth-century *Rule of Columbanus*, stress the necessity of frugality for monks.¹¹⁹ Various regulations specify distinctions in the diet of monks, which depend on whether they are engaged in physical labour or contemplative tasks. Maria Dembinska, who has examined regulations for monks in Western Europe, writes that up to the ninth century the daily diet of religious men and women was very restricted and fasts were so severe that a strong will was needed to adhere to them.¹²⁰ Fasting diets, which were prescribed for the various fasting periods throughout the year, were always reduced to one meal a day (instead of the customary two) and sometimes consisted of only bread and water. Dembinska writes that in the mid-fifth century the usual diet of monks was increased with cheese, eggs and sometimes small fish on feast days. The very austere diet, according to the fourth-century ascetic writer John Cassianus, who first introduced the rules of

¹¹⁸ The monks gather whatever food appears suitable to them for the Lent period and take it with them out into the desert. Instead of communal prayers every monk spends this time on his own; H. Magennis ed. and trans., *The Old English Life of Saint Mary of Egypt: an edition of the Old English text with modern English parallel-text translation* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 68.

¹¹⁹ Hadden and Stubbs eds., 'Rule of S. Columba', *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, 2, 119–21.

¹²⁰ M. Dembinska, 'Fasting and working monks: regulations of the fifth to eleventh centuries', in: A. Fenton and E. Kisban eds., *Food in Change: eating habits from the Middle Ages to the present day* (Edinburgh: Donald in association with the National Museums of Scotland, 1986), 152–60, at 153.

Eastern monasticism into the West, might lead to temptation, since the body will demand all that is withheld from it.¹²¹ When Benedict of Nursia in the sixth century introduced physical labour as part of the monks' daily obligations, food portions had to be adapted accordingly. Working monks received more substantial meals. Fasting was now regulated by the monastic calendar, so that labour could be avoided on such days. Individual fasts were still possible, but they had to be undertaken with the permission of the abbot.¹²² Fast days were reduced to approximately 190 to 200 per year, which is 30 to 40 days fewer than in the fifth century.

Fasting is not a clearly defined term, since it can denote anything from abstinence from meat to eating low-quality food, or not eating at all. Many regulations are fairly imprecise when it comes to descriptions of how fasting should be conducted. For many religious, fasting meant adhering to a set number of meals that did not contain meat or dairy produce. In the eleventh century, for example, the eating of low-quality bread counted as mortification.¹²³

By the ninth century many monastic foundations had departed from Benedict of Nursia's Rules. For this reason Benedict of Aniane set out to clarify the regulations anew, so that all the religious within the realm of Louis the Pious could abide by the same guidelines. Like his predecessor, Benedict decreed that at noon two cooked dishes, or three, if fresh fruit and vegetables were available, should be served. Each monk should receive a pound of bread. The evening meal should consist of bread and fruit, plus whatever was left over from the midday meal.¹²⁴

Evidence for the diet of monks prior to the tenth-century Benedictine Reform in Anglo-Saxon England is rather sketchy. Written sources of the period, such as the works by Bede or Aldhelm, generally do not tell us about eating habits. When Bede writes that the community at Lindisfarne in the seventh century had no money, only cattle, this is not necessarily a comment on the food preferences of the monks on Holy Island, but should be seen as a comment on their wealth.¹²⁵ Cattle were regarded as portable income in pre-monetary societies and animals were still paid as taxes after coinage was introduced. Even later writers, such as Ælfric, who was much committed to teaching and instructing the laity, are not in the habit of talking about specific foods, unless they are used as examples (such as the lamb signifying Christ) or symbolise sins (such as the oysters consumed by the priest in the *Seasons for Fasting*).¹²⁶

Not much is known of the everyday activities in early Anglo-Saxon monasteries, but in 973 the *Regularis Concordia*, based on the *Regula S Benedicti*, the

¹²¹ Dembinska, 'Fasting and working', 153.

¹²² Dembinska, 'Fasting and working', 154.

¹²³ Dembinska, 'Fasting and working', 155.

¹²⁴ J. van Winter, 'Obligatory fasts and voluntary asceticism in the Middle Ages', in: Fenton and Kisban eds., *Food in Change*, 161–6, at 163.

¹²⁵ *HE* 3, chap. 26, 310.

¹²⁶ *ASPR* VI, 98–104, ll. 220b–3. The manuscript copy (BL, Cotton Otho B.xi) was almost entirely destroyed in the fire in the Ashbourne House library of Sir Robert Cotton in 1733, which makes the poem hard to date. A transcript of the poem was made by Laurence Nowell in 1562. This poem, according to Hugh Magennis, is a cynical look at the clergy, who, instead of celebrating mass, fill their bellies; *Anglo-Saxon Appetites*, 85–92.

Benedictine Rule, was sanctioned by the Council of Winchester, with the purpose of uniting all religious houses in England under one rule. The *Regularis Concordia* contains a whole chapter on the 'customs of the regular life', which lists prayers, prayer times and even the changing of shoes before entering the refectory on non-feast days, but makes no mention of the foods that should be eaten.¹²⁷ The *Regularis* advises that monks gave up their *pinguedo*, which is foods made from milk and eggs, between *Septuagesima* (the seventh Sunday after Epiphany) and *Quinquagesima* (the ninth Sunday after Epiphany), but should adhere to the usual Lenten abstinence from *Quinquagesima* onwards.¹²⁸ Provisions in the reformed monasteries were in fact, still regulated by the *Benedictine Rule*. The daily meal was supposed to contain two cooked dishes per table, so that the infirm, if they could not eat one of them, had choice of another. If fruit and vegetables were available, they were to be added and a good pound of bread, which should suffice for the day. On days where two meals were eaten, one half of bread was kept by the cellarer until dinner time.¹²⁹

The emphasis on crop growing depicted in the *Phoenix* poem may be a reflection of a growing diversification of agriculture, but may also mirror the monastic environment in which the poem was recorded. While there are no food laws in the New Testament,¹³⁰ and apostles such as Paul are highly indifferent to the question of whether meat should be consumed or not,¹³¹ the asceticism practised by the early monasteries impacted on attitudes towards meat consumption. One of the most influential advocates of abstention from eating meat is the fifth-century writer Jerome.¹³² Jerome and other Church writers underline that Paradise was vegetarian and God only allowed mankind the eating of meat as part of his pledge after the flood.¹³³ Influenced by ideas of the Greek Neoplatonists, Jerome draws a link between the consumption of meat and sexual appetites.¹³⁴ Some of the late Antique Christian theologians associate Christ and his disciples with vegetarianism, which becomes an influential thought in the works of Alcuin and Hrabanus Maurus.¹³⁵ Monks in particular are invited to follow the alleged examples of Christ and his disciples.

The *Benedictine Rule* advises that monks should abstain from the consumption of quadrupeds.¹³⁶ The late tenth-century canon laws of Wulfstan recommend that monks should never take flesh as their food, nor should any form of poultry be served in the refectory. Fowl should be purely reared for the diet of the infirm.¹³⁷

¹²⁷ Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, 22.

¹²⁸ Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, 32.

¹²⁹ J. McCann ed., *The Rule of St Benedict* (London: Burns & Oates, 1952), chap. 39, 94–6.

¹³⁰ In fact, the Old Testament food laws are supposed to have been made redundant by Christ, Mark 7: 15.

¹³¹ Letter to the Romans 14: 2–14.

¹³² *Adversus Iovinianum*, ed. Migne, PL 23 (1888), 221–352.

¹³³ Genesis 9: 3–5.

¹³⁴ H. Lutterbach, 'Was das christliche Mönchtum mit der neutestamentlichen Indifferenz gegenüber dem Fleischverzicht anfang', *Biblisches Forum* 1 (2000), 2–19, at 9.

¹³⁵ Lutterbach, 'Fleischverzicht', 11.

¹³⁶ McCann, *Rule of St Benedict*, chap. 39, 96.

¹³⁷ J. Cross and A. Hamer ed. and trans., *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 83.

Such severe restrictions may not have been the result of added religious zeal, but may have been necessary in times of diminished provisions. Food may have been in short supply at the time when the laws were drawn up, as various entries from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for the late tenth and especially the eleventh century show.¹³⁸ Whereas the *Benedictine Rule* encourages the celebration of Maundy meals for the poor, the quality and quantity of food and drink on these occasions is not specified. It appears that much was left to the judgement of the individual house.

The communal meal was an essential component of monastic life. The *Rule of Saint Benedict* uses the exclusion from the meal as a punishment.¹³⁹ If a brother is accused of a more grievous fault he is not only excluded from the common meal and the oratory, but also from any kind of human contact. He will not be blessed, nor will his food, and he has to contemplate his fate according to the word of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5: 5, a passage that advises the exclusion of a member of the community who has committed fornication.¹⁴⁰

THE KING'S FEEDING

Literary evidence presents a culture in which all groups of society were bound in a circle of provision. The laws of various English kings can give us insights into the various patterns. Some of these laws concern taxes payable by tenants or by landholders to the landlord or king (the so-called *feorm*),¹⁴¹ and the obligations that a king had towards his subject. They give us an indication of the extent of tax payments (and by default, the range of produce available to the Anglo-Saxons) and what importance was given to them (such as the relative value of meat and honey). The remaining documents only represent a small percentage of society, which mainly concern the obligations of landholders.

Both early Irish and Anglo-Saxon legal texts show that the king's subordinates had an obligation to 'feast' the royal household.¹⁴² Laws governing food and

¹³⁸ For example, in 1042, 1044 and 1046.

¹³⁹ McCann, *Rule of St Benedict*, chap. 24, p. 72:

Si quis tamen frater in levioribus culpis invenitur, a mensae participatione privetur. Privati autem a mensae consortio ista erit ratio: ut in oratorio psalmum aut antiphonam non imponat neque lectionem recitet usque ad satisfactionem. Refectionem autem cibi post fratrum refectionem solus accipiat; ut si verbi gratia fratres reficiunt sexta hora, ille frater nona, si fratres nona, ille vespera: usque dum satisfactione congrua veniam consequatur.

'If a brother be found guilty of a lesser fault, let him be excluded from sharing the common table. And this shall be the rule for one who is excluded from the common table: Until he have made satisfaction, he shall not intone psalm or antiphon in the oratory, nor read a lesson, and he shall have his meals alone, after the community meals. If the brethren, for instance, eat at the sixth hour, let him eat at the ninth, if they eat at the ninth hour, let him eat in the evening; until by suitable satisfaction he have obtained pardon'; trans. McCann.

¹⁴⁰ McCann, *Rule of St Benedict*, chap. 25, 74.

¹⁴¹ Chris Wickham has recently commented on the confusing legal terminology of Anglo-Saxon food renders, which were vague across the period, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 322–3.

¹⁴² Hildegard Tristram writes that the right of being served and entertained was called *foigde* in the Old Irish texts and that not even monasteries were exempt from having to feast the lawful ruler and his

feasting have been ascribed to some of the earliest of the Anglo-Saxon kings. However, the earliest compilation of laws extant was copied at Winchester not before the mid-tenth century.¹⁴³ These collections, according to Mary Richards, display a strong interest in history. Laws in the manuscripts were placed next to historical documents, such as royal genealogies and historical writings like Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. They were not necessarily copied in chronological order but were placed under certain subheadings. The lawcode of Ine of Wessex (688–726), for example, was preserved in an appendix to the lawcode of Alfred, so that Ine's law against fighting in the king's house in the Parker manuscript (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 173) is complemented by Alfred's law, which addresses locations not covered by the former.¹⁴⁴ The laws of Ine were obviously used to underpin the new laws of Alfred. Editors have subsequently dissected such texts and put them into chronological sequence.¹⁴⁵ Laws were obviously also preserved for their historical interest, and this is the case not only for Anglo-Saxon texts, which were copied right up to Norman times, such as the *Textus Roffensis* (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303). Lawcodes do not always just contain lists of offences, but also give insights into the duties and rights of individuals.

The princes of early medieval Europe were peripatetic. Anglo-Saxon kings, too, would have travelled between royal residences, accompanied by their court.¹⁴⁶ Thomas Charles-Edwards writes that itineration was an essential economic basis for kingship, because no large household could stay in one place for more than a few weeks without long-distance supply of essential food stuffs.¹⁴⁷ He notes that in Ireland and Wales this itineration, known as the 'king's circuit', could be organised in two ways: the king could have a number of buildings or halls around his kingdom,¹⁴⁸ or he might expect the hospitality of a magnate or sub-king. Anglo-Saxon kings governed their territories in similar fashion, and we know of a number of royal sites, mainly from documentary

retinue. This right was exercised once in the earliest time between New Year and Lent and later four times a year. '*Feis und Fled*', 199–201.

¹⁴³ Richards, 'Manuscript context', 172.

¹⁴⁴ Richards, 'Manuscript context', 174. For the laws, see Liebermann, *Die Gesetze* 1, 90–1 and 52.

¹⁴⁵ Richards, 'Manuscript context', 171.

¹⁴⁶ One of these royal residences has been excavated at Cheddar.

¹⁴⁷ T. Charles-Edwards, 'Early medieval kingships in the British Isles', in: S. Bassett ed., *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (London/New York: Leicester University Press, 1989), 28–39, at 28: 'It made much more sense to take a royal household to the food rather than the food to the royal household.' This, according to John Blair, reduces the need for transport and storage, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 252. Katherine Simms has examined feasting in Ireland. Apart from the Christian tradition that every guest is Christ [Luke 14: 8–15], there is also a pagan code of values, instilling 'an almost superstitious avoidance of "the six sons of Dishonour", to wit, Niggardliness and Refusal and Denial'. She writes that in the Old Irish period every free landowner above the rank of *ócaire* was theoretically expected to receive kings, bishops, doctors or judges from the road. A particular obligation rested on the wealthiest grade of commoner, who 'refuses no company' and has 'an ever-stocked cauldron'; 'Guesting and feasting in Gaelic Ireland', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 108 (1978), 67–100, at 68–9.

¹⁴⁸ This is not restricted to Celtic areas: one only has to think of the *aula regis* of Carolingian emperors.

sources, where written evidence refers to altogether 193 royal residences.¹⁴⁹ In fact, John Blair states that the landscape was organised for the support of itinerant courts.¹⁵⁰ Many of the estates from which episodic food renders were drawn have still to be excavated, but the meeting places of the king's circuit in the structures that have come to light to date show that a variety of functional halls, large or small, were used for this purpose. In addition to such purpose-built residences, kings appear to made visits to monasteries as well.¹⁵¹ Charles-Edwards points to the examples in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* where the tables of Aidan, Finan and Colman at Lindisfarne, though frugally appointed, were still shared with the monarch.¹⁵²

Yeavering in Northumberland is the earliest known Anglo-Saxon royal residence,¹⁵³ which contains a number of halls built and extended during the early seventh century. Some of the buildings had two stories and would have been ideal for a meeting place of the king and his council. However, the sort of pottery sherds found elsewhere as indicators of feasting, were, according to Brian Hope-Taylor, relatively few and small. The largest hall could have been used for the high seat of a king. The absence of settlement debris makes it unlikely that this site was permanently inhabited, and it may have been used only for the king's circuit.

A number of halls have been found at Cowdery's Down, Basingstoke. The largest of them measured 22.6 metres by 9 metres and was surrounded by a number of other buildings, some of which were *Grubenhäuser* in which animal bone and pottery debris were found. The building possibly had a wooden floor and was dated to the seventh century.¹⁵⁴ The ninth-century stone-built hall at Northampton would have been a fitting residence for the kings of Mercia, but, like the building at Yeavering, was given up at some stage.¹⁵⁵ The hall has no parallel in Anglo-Saxon England, but is similar to royal residences on the Continent.¹⁵⁶ The royal palace at Cheddar was used by late Saxon as well as early

¹⁴⁹ P. Rahtz, 'Royal rites', in: Lapidge *et al.*, *Blackwell Encyclopaedia*, 399–401, at 400; see also Liebermann, *Gesetze* 2, 738.

¹⁵⁰ Blair, *Church*, 253.

¹⁵¹ Stephen Baxter underlines the role of monasteries as political hubs in late Anglo-Saxon England, where powerful overlords mark out their influence through patronage. I am grateful to Dr Baxter for allowing me to see unpublished material for his forthcoming book.

¹⁵² *HE*, 3, chap. 26, 310:

Rex ipse, cum oportunitas exegisset, cum quinque tantum aut sex ministris ueniebat, et expleta in ecclesia oratione discedebat. Quodsi forte eos ibi refici contingeret, simplici tantum et cotidiano fratrum cibo contenti nil ultra quaerebant. Tota enim fuit tunc sollicitudo doctoribus illis Deo seruiendi, non saeculo; tota cura cordis excolendi, non uentris.

'The king himself used to come, whenever opportunity allowed, with only five or six thegns, and when he had finished his prayers in the church he went away. If they happened to take a meal there, they were content with the simple daily fare of the brothers and asked for nothing more. The sole concern of these teachers was to serve God and not the world, to satisfy the soul and not the belly'; trans. Colgrave and Mynors.

¹⁵³ B. Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering: an Anglo-British centre of early Northumbria* (London: HMSO, 1977).

¹⁵⁴ M. Millett, *Excavations at Cowdery's Down, Basingstoke: interim report* (Basingstoke: Basingstoke and Deane Planning Department, 1981).

¹⁵⁵ J. Williams, M. Shaw and V. Denham eds., *The Middle Saxon Palaces at Northampton*, 2 vols (Northampton: Northampton Development Corporation, 1985).

¹⁵⁶ Williams, Shaw and Denham, *Middle Saxon Palaces* 1, 31–5.

medieval kings. Historical documents link the place with eminent figures such as Archbishop Dunstan, who spent time at the court of Athelstan. The complex at Cheddar during the Anglo-Saxon period consisted of a hall, chapel and some smaller buildings.¹⁵⁷ The isolated early-middle Anglo-Saxon settlement of Chalton (Hampshire) has no immediate water supply and is therefore not a convenient place for agriculture or animal husbandry. Only a few *Grubenhäuser* were found, but many larger constructions indicate a number of wooden post buildings. The largest building, dated to the seventh century, measured 24.4 m x 5.1 m, which indicates that this was a royal hall. The inhabitants of the Chalton hall, according to the finds from their rubbish pits, were very fond of oysters.¹⁵⁸

Royal halls are significantly different from structures excavated at early settlement sites, which often do not contain a building large enough to house a king and his companions. At Mucking, at least 53 post hole buildings and 203 *Grubenhäuser* were discovered, but no large or central building.¹⁵⁹ In contrast seven major halls were found at West Stow. The buildings here were small in comparison to contemporary continental types.¹⁶⁰ The preparations for feasts did not always have to occur inside the building, since five hearths were found at West Stow that could not be associated with any structure and may have served as 'field kitchens'. Large halls may have had enough space for safe firepits. The big cauldron found in the ship burial of mount 1 at Sutton Hoo requires to be hung from at least from a height of four metres, which suggests that it was intended for a fairly tall building.¹⁶¹

The food and drink consumed at the feast would have been most likely collected through taxation, and evidence for the administration of royal estates comes from documents such as the *Rectitudines*. Here the *geneat*, 'companion/vassal', is obliged to perform messenger services, is responsible for the upkeep of buildings and fences, and has the duty *hlaforð feormian*, 'to nourish his lord', in addition to paying a number of taxes.¹⁶² The *Rectitudines* make allowances to the differences in the local agricultural economies since it states that conditions are easier or more difficult in some regions, and the laws may change accordingly.

¹⁵⁷ P. Rahtz, *The Saxon and Medieval Palaces at Cheddar: excavations 1960–62*, BAR British Series 65 (Oxford 1979).

¹⁵⁸ Capelle, *Archäologie*, 29–31.

¹⁵⁹ Hamerow, *Excavations at Mucking* 2, ix.

¹⁶⁰ S. West ed., *The West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village*, 2 vols, EAA Archaeological Report 24 (Ipswich: Suffolk County Council, 1985), 1, 111.

¹⁶¹ Capelle, *Archäologie*, 33.

¹⁶² Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 445:

Geneates riht. Geneathriht is mislic be ðam ðe on lande stænt: on sumon he sceal landgafol syllan ȝ gærsswyn on geare ȝ ridan ȝ aerian ȝ lade lædan, wyrcan ȝ hlaforð feormian, ripan ȝ mawan, deorhege heawan ȝ sæte haldan, bytlian ȝ burh hegegian, nigefaran to tune feccan, cyricsceat syllan ȝ ælmesfeoh, heafodwearde healdan ȝ horswearde, ærendian fyr swa nyr, swa hwyder swa him mon to tæcð.

'The *geneat*'s duty: The *geneat*'s duty varies, depending upon what is determined for the estate. In some he must pay ground rent and one store-pig a year, and a ride, and carry and supply cartage, work and entertain his lord, reap and mow, cut deer-fences and maintain hides, build and fence fortifications, conduct strangers to the manor, pay church dues and alms, attend his superior and guard the horses, carry messages far and near, wherever he is directed'; trans. M. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Prose* (London: Dent, 1993), 27.

Therefore in some areas the farmer can pay his duty in honey, in others in food or beer.¹⁶³

The taxation payable as a food rent was called *feorm* or *foster* in Old English. A *feorm* was not just payable to the king, according to Rosamond Faith, since it appears that in Anglo-Saxon England all figures of authority were supported by levies of food and other goods from the inhabitants of the land.¹⁶⁴ This tribute seems to have been raised from a defined land unit, not *per capita*, and could be ceded to others. These land units were occupied by both free and unfree tenants, who were responsible for the payment of the *feorm*.¹⁶⁵ The payment of food renders even survived the introduction of coin economies and the Norman Conquest. Felix Liebermann writes that up to the thirteenth century an abbot travelling with his retinue could expect sustenance for a day from a manor. This privilege was also granted to bishops, ealdormen, government officials, stewards, messengers of neighbouring princes and servants who looked after the dogs and horses for a hunt, which may be implied in the *festingmen*, ‘feasting men’ of the king.¹⁶⁶

Food rents were collected not only in Anglo-Saxon England, but also in medieval Wales and Ireland, where they have been studied in the context of socio-cultural relations. Charles-Edwards has observed that in return for the obligation to feast a king and his household, the visit would create frequent access to the sovereign’s presence and favour.¹⁶⁷ However, this would only apply to those landholders who received the king and/or his retinue during his circuit. For tenants on the periphery of food collections, rarer visits made both burdens and rewards less important. Equally, beyond the boundaries of the royal circuit, in areas where tributes had to be paid as a result of military intervention, the relationship was servile, because the exchange was all one way.¹⁶⁸

The *feorm* is calculated on the basis of how much is required to entertain the recipients for one night.¹⁶⁹ In the laws of Ine of Wessex the amount of food rent to be payable from every ten hides is stated as follows:

x fata hunies, ccc hlafa, xii ambra Wilisc ealað, xxx hluttres, tu eald hriðeru oððe x weðeras, x gees, xx henna, x cesas, amber fulne buteran, v leaxas, xx pundwæga foðres ȝ hundteontig æla¹⁷⁰

¹⁶³ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 448:

On sumen landa gebur sceal syllan huniggafol, on suman metegafol, on suman ealugafol. Hede se ðe scire healde, þæt he wite á, hwæt ealdlandræden sy ȝ hwæt ðeode ðeaw
‘On one estate the farmer shall pay a tribute in honey, in other a food tribute and in another a tribute in ale. The one who holds the shire should need to know what the old law of the land is and what the people’s law is.’

¹⁶⁴ R. Faith, ‘*Feorm*’, in: Lapidge et al., *Blackwell Encyclopaedia*, 181–2, at 181. See also P. Stafford, ‘“The farm of one night” and the organisation of King Edward’s estates in Domesday’, *Economic History Review* 33 (1980), 491–502.

¹⁶⁵ Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 323.

¹⁶⁶ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 2, 421. The term *festingmen* appears first in a Latin charter by Berhtulf to Athellwulf ‘*dux*’ in 843/4, which exempts the provision of the retainers, falconers and those who look after the dogs and horses; B443.

¹⁶⁷ Charles-Edwards, ‘Early medieval kingship’, 31. See also Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 195–6.

¹⁶⁸ Charles-Edwards, ‘Early medieval kingship’, 31.

¹⁶⁹ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 2, 421. Stafford, ‘“The farm of one night”’.

¹⁷⁰ ‘Ten vats of honey, three hundred loaves, twelve measures of “Welsh ale”, thirty measures of pale ale,

Despite the fact that Chris Wickham argues that such tributes were not a heavy levy,¹⁷¹ they had to be raised as surplus from the land. The calculation of the *feorm* is based on itineration of the royal household, even if there is not a chance for the king to visit all the estates. Apart from such secular duties, landowners and tenants will have also had to pay tributes to the Church. Parish churches and monasteries, unlike the king's circuit, were permanent and had to be provided for on a regular basis. The tax burden of the Church, according to John Blair, is difficult to assess, since it already held its own lands out of bequests of kings and other benefactors.¹⁷²

Rectitudines give us an insight into the duties of the various groups of society. We hear that the *gebur* (lowest rank of free man) has to work a certain number of days for his lord, but also give the swineherd six loaves of bread. The bee-keeper has to pay a food rent of five *sextar* of honey,¹⁷³ and the free swineherd in many regions has to give fifteen pigs (ten fully grown and five young ones) to his lord but can keep the rest for himself, whereas the unfree swineherd can keep one piglet and its intestines to himself.¹⁷⁴

It appears that taxation was essentially paid in food stuffs even after coinage was introduced. King Athelstan (924–937) commanded his reeves in every borough to render tithes of their own property, both in livestock and fruits of the earth, such as foods that could be counted or weighed exactly. These tithes were due once a year on the feast day of John the Baptist (24 June).¹⁷⁵

Exemptions from the payment of *feorm* could only be granted by the king. Monastic communities, in particular, seemed to be granted the benefits from being discharged of the duties of hospitality.¹⁷⁶ In return for land donations or the

two adult cows or ten withers, ten geese, twenty hens, ten cheeses, a measure of butter, five salmon, twenty pound weight of fodder and a hundred eels'; Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 118–21. The Welsh ale mentioned here is in all probability a drink containing honey and beer, called *bragget* in Welsh Laws.

¹⁷¹ Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 321. He argues, for example, that 300 loaves is the annual wield of just one hectare of land. At another place, however, he speculates that the unfree may have paid the bulk of these taxes, 323.

¹⁷² Blair, *Church*, 252.

¹⁷³ The Latin translation demands '*VI sestaria mellis*', Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 448. The sester is about a pint; A. Hagen, *Second Handbook*, 279.

¹⁷⁴ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 449.

¹⁷⁵ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 146–7.

¹⁷⁶ There are a number of writs in which the king grants ecclesiastical institutions the right to enjoy all the revenue from the land. This writ by Cnut to Æthelnoth is just one example; F.E. Harmer ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1989, 2nd edn), 183:

Cnut cyncg gret ealle mine b[iscop] 7 mine eorlas 7 mine gerefan on ælcere scire þe Æþelnoð arceþ 7 se hired æt Cristes cyrcean land inne habbað freondlice. 7 ic cyðe eow þ[æt] ic hæbbe geunnen him þ[æt] he beo his saca 7 socne wyrðe. 7 griðbryces 7 hamsocne 7 forstealles 7 infangenes þeofes 7 flymena fyrmðe ofer his agene menn binnan byrig 7 butan 7 ofer Cristes cyrcean 7 ofer swa feala þegna swa ic him to lætan hæbbe 7 ic nelle þ[æt] ænig mann aht þær on teo buton he 7 his wicneras for þam ic hæbbe Criste þas gerihta forgyfen minre sawle to ecere alysendnesse 7 ic nelle þ[æt] æfre ænig mann þis abrece be minum freondscipe

'King Cnut amicably greets all my bishops and my nobles and my reeves in every shire where Æthelnoth and the community of Christ Church hold land. And I make known to you that I have granted to him that he is to obtain his sake and soke, grithbreach, *hamsocn* and *foresteall* and *infangenetheof* and *flymenafyrmth* over his own men within the borough and outside, and over Christ Church, and over as many thegns as I have granted to him. And I do not want that [other] any man [to] possess any of it, apart from himself [Æthelnoth] and his stewards, because I have given these rights to

right not to pay food rents, the king would expect spiritual assistance. Charters seemed to have come into being with the conversion of the English, and in the earliest period they essentially document the giving of property to churches on a permanent basis, but later these also contained exemptions from taxation.¹⁷⁷ The custom of giving land or tax exemption in return for spiritual assistance seems to precede such bequests of indemnity. The Kentish king Wihtred (690–725) exempts the Church from taxation, but demands at the same time that the king shall be prayed for and honoured *buton neadhæse heora willum*, ‘without compulsion of their wills’.¹⁷⁸ Bede tells us that King Oswiu gave his daughter Ælfflæd, when she was hardly a year old, to be consecrated as a nun to Hartlepool, in addition to twelve small estates, as a token of his gratitude for the victory that was granted to him over Penda.¹⁷⁹ In return for Oswiu’s generosity the monks were to wage ‘heavenly warfare’ and pray so that his people would win eternal peace.

Often privileges brought with them additional legal rights. The laws of Alfred, for example, grant those monasteries that receive the king’s food rent the right to give any fugitive three days’ asylum.¹⁸⁰ If this fugitive commits a crime during the period of sanctuary, the community, and not the king, will be the receiver of 120 shillings for the violation of the peace. Feeding a stranger has legal implications in the early Middle Ages. Anybody who entertains (literally ‘feeds’) a stranger for more than three days in his own home, according to the Kentish laws of Hlothhere (673–685) and Eadric (685–686), is also liable for him.¹⁸¹

It is not clear who would gather or calculate the food renders, but there must have been the temptation to pay less or even withhold the produce. Undermining the royal food supplies is regarded as an offence even in the earliest Kentish lawcodes. The terminology of early laws can be opaque, especially when a *hapax legomenon* is concerned. Lisi Oliver has argued that *cyninges fedesl*, which is mentioned in the laws of Æthelberht of Kent (560?–616), should be understood as violating the responsibility of the king’s feeding,¹⁸² not as previously interpreted by Liebermann and Toller,¹⁸³ as ‘somebody fed by the king’.

Christ for the eternal redemption of my soul and I don’t want that ever any man should break this, by my friendship.’

The writ, preserved in a manuscript at Lambeth Palace (Gospel of MacDurnan, fol. 114b), is dated to 1020 and is considered to be authentic by Harmer. The formula *saca 7 socn* etc. denotes the special favours granted, because the king enjoyed the rights to payments in case of a breach of the peace that he hereby signed away. The king’s protection is here transferred to the archbishop and would have given him not only power, but also new revenue; Harmer, 79–82.

¹⁷⁷ Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 315.

¹⁷⁸ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 12, Laws of Wihtred I.

¹⁷⁹ *HE*, 3, chap. 24, 290.

¹⁸⁰ F.L. Attenborough ed. and trans., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: CUP, 1922), 64, see also Ine, Liebermann, *Gesetze* I, 102.

¹⁸¹ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 11:

Gif man cuman feormæp III niht an his aġenum hame, cepemann oþþe oðerne þe sio ofer mearc cuman, 7 hine þonne his mete fede, 7 he þonne ænigum mæn yfel gedo, se man þane oðerne æt rihte gebrenge oþþe riht forewyrce.

‘If one feeds a stranger for three nights in his own home, a salesman or other who came over the border, and gives him his food, and he does any evil to another man, [then] he must bring the other man to justice or do justice himself.’

¹⁸² L. Oliver, ‘*Cyninges fedesl*: the king’s feeding in Æthelberht, ch. 12’, *ASE* 27 (1998), 31–40; for Æthelberht 12, see also Liebermann, *Gesetze* 2, 4.

Since a king's loyalty to maintain a retinue depended to some extent on his ability to feed his men, the preoccupation with food rents in legal texts is understandable. Obviously, to undermine such payments, and thus the food supply to royal residences, would also weaken the king's position in this region. The tenth-century Welsh poem *Armes Prydain*, which was preserved in the fourteenth-century *Book of Taliesin*, contains an exhortation for the Celtic tribes to unite and expel the Anglo-Saxons. This uprising will start by a refusal of the Welsh to pay their levies.¹⁸⁴ The exhortation of levies from defeated enemies seems to have a special place in the narratives of the subjugation of people. Bede makes use of it when he describes how the incoming Anglo-Saxons extorted tributes from the Picts, whom they had already driven out of their territories. These tributes demanded a greater supply of food, and the Picts were threatened that if the Anglo-Saxons would not receive what they asked for, they would break their treaty and lay waste their lands.¹⁸⁵

Food rents and provisions that were gathered at royal residences did not only benefit the king, but also those who were part of his household and his servants and slaves. The feeding of dependants was not only the duty of a king, but seems to have been exercised by all free men at some stage. In the lawcode of Æthelberht, dependants of a free man (*ceorl*) are called *hlafætas*, literally 'loaf-eaters', which underlines their reliance on being fed by their superiors: '*Gif man ceorlæs hlafetan geslæhð VI scillingum gebete*'.¹⁸⁶ Athelstan makes it known to all the reeves in his kingdom that a destitute Englishman should be provided with food, even if he is found outside his home district.¹⁸⁷ All this should be done for the love of God and with the knowledge of the bishop in whose diocese this gift is granted.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Oliver, 'Cyninges', 31–7. Liebermann has noted that the terms *cyninges fedesl* and *hlafæta* are only found in Kentish laws; *Gesetze* II, 424.

¹⁸⁴ G.J. Evans ed. and trans., *Poems from the Book of Taliesin* (Llanbedrog: Tremban, 1915), 160–1, ll. 15–21:

Myrthin prophesises that the stewards of the King,
will meet at Aber Ython; and before there
could be any right (the Kymry) will complain of a levy
against which they will, heart and soul, protest
that the stewards will gather their crops, since
in Kymry's treasures there will be no reserve.
A great authority has told us that no one would
ever come, who should pay anything in bondage. (trans. Evans)

¹⁸⁵ *HE*, 1, chap. 15, 53.

¹⁸⁶ Æthelberht 25; Liebermann, *Gesetze* I, 4: 'If one slays the "loaf-eater" of a free man, they should pay six shillings.'

¹⁸⁷ Athelstan Ordinances to Charity in the Preface to I Athelstan, Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 148–9:

þæt ic wille, þæt ge fedað ealle wæga an earm Engliscmon, gif ge him habbaþ, oþþe oþernes gefindað, 1. Fram twam minra feorma agyfe mon hine elce monað ane ambra meles 7 an sconc spices oþþe an ram weorþe III peningas 7 scrud for twelf monþa ælc gear
'I declare that I want you to always feed a poor Englishman, if you have him with you [in your area] or find him elsewhere. 1. From two of my food rents give him each month one measure flour and one bacon or a ram worth four pennies, and clothes for 12 month each year.' The Latin version has an addition that stipulates that the poor man should also receive four cheeses and on that on the third day of Easter 30 pence shall be paid.

¹⁸⁸ See Matthew 25: 35.

There is some indication of how much of the king's revenue, which was derived from taxes and food rents, was intended for the upkeep of his men in ninth-century England. The biographer of King Alfred, Asser, writes that when the first part of the revenues to the king was collected, it was divided into two equal parts. One part was reserved for secular affairs, and in turn was divided into three portions. The first portion was paid to the fighting men and the thegns living at court.¹⁸⁹ In his free translation of Boethius' *De consolazione Philosophiae*, King Alfred asserts that a king must be able to sustain the three classes of men that constitute society, by giving them land to live on, gifts, weapons, food, ale, clothing, and whatever is necessary for each of them.¹⁹⁰

The *Rectitudines* give us an indication of how much retainers could expect in return for their loyalty: they earn two fields per twelve months of service, one already sown and the other unsown, plus food and also receive their shoes and gloves.¹⁹¹ Anything they can earn on top is by their own merit. According to the *Rectitudines* shoes and gloves were provided not only for free men, but also for those in bondage: they are part of the payment of an oxherd. Unfree members of the estate had to be fed at Midwinter (which Liebermann renders as a 'Christmas feast') and Easter.¹⁹² In some areas it is customary for people to receive Winterfood, Easterfood, sustenance during harvest work, a drink for ploughing, a fee for mowing, some food for bringing in the hay, for loading wood and many more things, which the author feels unable to list fully here.¹⁹³ Unfree women are given eight pounds of grain a year and either one sheep or three pence to see them through winter, a sester of beans for Lent, whey in summer or a penny for their sustenance, but their male counterparts are given twelve pounds of grain, two sheep, one cow to eat and the right to cut wood.¹⁹⁴ According to their occupation, goatherds, cheese makers and foresters keep part of their produce.

While much of the food that passed between lord and retainer would be intended for their everyday consumption, there were special occasions, such as feasts, where food and drink would be used to consolidate the relationship between the two parties. In the early Irish tribal kingship system feasting was one of the responsibilities of the king. The laws set one day of the week aside for his drinking, towards which the clients were supposed to provide malt. In some

¹⁸⁹ S. Keynes and M. Lapidge trans., *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 106.

¹⁹⁰ W. Sedgefield ed., *King Alfred's Old English Version of 'De Consolacione Philosophiae'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 40: þ[æt] is þon heora biwist: land to bugianne, ȝ gifta, ȝ wæpnu, ȝ mete, ȝ ealo, ȝ clāpas, ȝ gehwæt þæs ðe þa þre geferscipas behofiað, 'this is for their sustenance: land to live on and gifts and weapons, and food, and ale, and clothing and whatever else the three orders need'. The three classes are praying men, fighting men and working men.

¹⁹¹ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 3, 450:

Be folgeran. Folgere gebyrð, þæt he on twelf monðum II æceras geearnige, oðerne gesawene ȝ oðerne unsawene; sædige sylf ðæne; ȝ his mete ȝ scoung ȝ glofung him gebyrð

'Concerning retainers. A retainer ought to earn two fields (acres) in twelve months, one sown and the other unsown; he is to sow the one himself; and he ought to have his food and shoes and gloves.'

¹⁹² The text mentions *Midwinter feorm* and *Eosterfeorm*.

¹⁹³ Liebermann, *Gesetze* I, 452–3.

¹⁹⁴ Liebermann, *Gesetze* I, 450.

sources the house of the king is called *tech midchuarta*, which is translated as 'house of the mead-circle'.¹⁹⁵ In Anglo-Saxon England such 'drinking parties' were organised in the name of the king. Feasting creates bonds and therefore regular meetings are important to keep dissent at a minimum; however, by late Anglo-Saxon times not even the king's circuit could involve all those people who were supposed to be fed by him or should feast the regent as part of their taxation. Therefore a 'replacement feast', organised in the name of the king, still nominally has the regent as the host and underlines his presence at this event.

Feasting was seen as an appropriate means of creating social cohesion. A passage in the laws of King Athelstan concerning the bishops and reeves of London desires that the representatives of the hundred-groups and those in charge of the bodies of ten shall assemble once a month (if their duties permit), whether 'during the butt-filling' or other occasions. Athelstan's law further stipulates that twelve men are supposed to have dinner together during this meeting and shall have the food they think appropriate, and give all the leftovers away for the grace of God.¹⁹⁶ This remark is puzzling: why should only twelve of the men receive a meal and the others go hungry? It can only be understood as a symbolic act in the context of the Last Supper (where the twelve disciples share a meal with Christ). This feast is more than just an occasion to demonstrate social cohesion, it is a celebration that has strong religious overtones. The link to the Last Supper includes commemoration, since Christ asks his disciple to break bread and drink wine in his memory.¹⁹⁷ The feeding of the poor from the leftover food will enhance the effect of the gathering, since they are presumably supposed to show their gratitude in prayers for the donors. Meetings of official groups did not only serve the affairs of the living, but were often tied to religious ceremonies, such as special masses or remembrance of the dead.

Regular dinner meetings seem to have also been commonplace for guilds, which originated as organisations for different groups of the population with mutual interests. We do not know when the first guild was founded in Anglo-Saxon England, but we have documentary evidence for the existence of such institutions by the tenth century. A few guild statutes are extant from our period and they can tell us what their members were supposed to contribute at meetings. For example, every member of the guild at Exeter was supposed to bring two

¹⁹⁵ R. Warner, 'The archaeology of early historic Irish kingship', in: S. Driscoll and M. Níeie eds., *Power and Politics in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 47–68, at 63.

¹⁹⁶ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 178:

þæt we us gegaderian á emban ænne monað 7 æmton habban, þa hyndenmenn 7 þa þe ða teoþunge bewitan, swa mid byttfyllinge swa elles swa us toanhagie, 7 witen, hwæt ure gecwydræddene gelæst sy; 7 habban þa XII menn heora metescype togædere 7 fedan hig swa swa hig sylfe wyrðe munon, 7 dælon ealle þa metelafe Godes þances.

'That we meet after every month if we can and have leisure to do so, the Hundredmen and those who supervise [the collection of] the tenth, be it for the "cask filling", or whatever suits us, and know how our agreement has been fulfilled, and 12 men shall have their meal together and eat whatever they think is worthy, and distribute all that is left over for the grace of God.'

¹⁹⁷ Matthew 26: 26–8, Mark, 14: 22–3, Luke 22: 19–20.

sesters of malt and a sceat's worth of honey to every meeting.¹⁹⁸ Honey and malt are, of course, ingredients with which alcoholic beverages such as beer and mead could be produced. The gatherings of guild members may have been viewed with suspicion by the clergy, since many of them were accompanied by religious ceremonies, such as mass and remembrance of their dead, which, as we will see, were regarded as the clerical domain.¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, guilds appear to have had close ties to monastic institutions and provided for their spiritual well-being with donations to religious houses. Since the patron saint of most guilds was St Peter, these payments were made before the feast day of the saint (29 June). In Orky's Guild at Abbotsbury, each member was supposed to give a penny-worth of wax or a penny – depending on what was most needed in the monastery. Every two pairs of guild brothers were supposed to give one broad loaf *well besewen* and *gesyfl*, as alms.²⁰⁰ Additionally they had to provide a *sester* of clean wheat five days before the feast of St Peter. All of these donations were understood as their entrance fee to mass. In the statute of the Thegns' Guild in Cambridge, written on a blank leaf of an eighth-century Gospel book in the late tenth century, for example, the penance for eating or drinking with one who has slain a guild-brother is one pound, unless he can deny together with his two bench-comrades that he knew the person.²⁰¹ Furthermore the statutes request the guild brothers to pay half of the funeral expenses for a deceased member, and if they cannot be present in the *translatio* of the body they are to pay a sester of honey.

Since kings encouraged regular meetings of their administrative bodies, it is not very surprising that the custom of drinking together enjoyed special protection in the Anglo-Saxon laws from the earliest period onwards. Even if no harm is done, the drawing of a weapon during a gathering is a punishable offence in the seventh-century lawcode of Hlothhere and Eadric.²⁰² If one man takes another's stoup without any reason, he is fined and has to pay compensation, not only to the person whom he has wronged, but also to the house-owner and another twelve

¹⁹⁸ B. Thorpe ed., *Diplomatarium Anglicum Ævi Saxonici: a collection of English charters* (London: Macmillan, 1865), 613–14.

¹⁹⁹ Gerd Althoff takes the rebuke by Alcuin in a letter to Æthelhard, archbishop of Canterbury, which states that not prayers, but drunkenness were the main occupation during *conventicula* meetings as a rebuttal for guilds; *Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue*, 209. The letter, however, describes meetings in which people who have left the Church are going to the hills to worship: *Et illa conventicula, in quibus deceptus est populus, aeclesias relinquentes et montana petentes loca, ibi non orationibus, sed ebrietatibus servientes*, 'and these small conventions, in which the people are deceived when they leave the churches and go to a place in the mountains, there they practise not prayers, but drunkenness'; E. Dümmler ed., *Alcuini Epistolae*, MGH Epistolae: Epistolae 4 Karolini Aevi 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), no. 290, 448.

²⁰⁰ Thorpe, *Diplomatarium Anglicum*, 605–6. Thorpe assumes that this meant sprinkled with seeds, such as dill or caraway. *Gesuf* is a fine wheat bread, but the word *suf* denotes what is eaten with bread or a kind of relish. Etymologically it is linked to Old Irish *supa*, 'broth' and Dutch *zuivel*, 'milk produce'; F. Holthausen, *Altenglischen Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1974), 329.

²⁰¹ BL, Cotton Tiberius BV, fol. 74. The book originally belonged to the abbey of Ely. Thorpe, *Diplomatarium Anglicum*, 612:

gif gegilda myd þæm ete oððe drince þe his gegildan stlog [sic!] ȝ butun hit beforan cyninge ȝ oððe leod bisceope ȝ oððe ealdorman beo ȝ gilde an pund ȝ butun he ætsacan mæge mid his twam gesetlun þ he hine nyste.

²⁰² Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 11.

shillings to the king.²⁰³ Ine of Wessex stipulates that when two men quarrel over their cups and one bears it patiently then the other shall be fined thirty shillings.²⁰⁴ A house or an estate in which the king was present enjoyed a special status in the Anglo-Saxon laws. In Æthelberht's lawcode the compensation due for an offence committed in the presence of the king at someone's house was double the normal amount.²⁰⁵ Anyone found fighting in the house of the king will lose his property, and it is up to the monarch to decide whether the offence will be punishable by execution.²⁰⁶

It is apparent that food is not just sustenance, but that the rules for the provision of it are structured in ways that can tell us about the relationship between various social groups. Changing patterns of agriculture within the Anglo-Saxon period may have led to different values being attributed to food stuffs. Animal husbandry was also subject to regional variation. Archaeological sources can give evidence about the kinds of animals that were reared and chart some of their life cycle as dairy providers, and eventually part of the food chain.

Increasingly technology helps us to understand patterns of nutrition. Diseases, too, can indicate malnutrition and give us information about the reality of food provisions in Anglo-Saxon England. Documentary evidence is haphazard: monastic rules contain sketchy evidence for the eating habits of one group of society, but other groups remain invisible. Textual evidence, however, can offer us insights into the provision of certain groups, but we still do not know how many other people were dependent on the pig that was given to the unfree swineherd. Written sources, such as the *Rectitudines* and laws, show the minimum amount of surplus food that could be generated from estates in Anglo-Saxon England. Food was paid as taxes to the king, who in return provided for his retinue from such revenues. Food rents show the relations that existed between lord and servant and different members of the community. They illustrate the obligations behind the lord-retainer relationship, which, in contrast to descriptions in literature, is very much based on food and feeding. They also illustrate the precautions that were set up to provide for those that worked the land. Food and drink is a part of a reciprocal arrangement that permeates all groups in society, and this includes the dead as well.

²⁰³ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 11.

²⁰⁴ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 93.

²⁰⁵ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 3, para. 3: *Gif cyning æt mannes ham drincæþ, 7 ðær man lyswæs hwæt gedo, twibote gebete*, 'If the king drinks in a man's home, and a man does something evil, he should pay two-fold compensation.'

²⁰⁶ Liebermann, *Gesetze* 1, 90–1: *Gif hwa gefeohte on cyninges huse, sie he scyldig ealles his ierfes, 7 sie on cyninges dome, hwæðer he lif age þe nage*, 'If anyone fights in the king's house, he is to forfeit all his possessions, and it is within the king's judgement, whether he has his life or not.'

Bare Bones: Animals in Cemeteries

THE TREASURES found with pagan graves have fascinated for a long time.¹ In contrast, the post-Conversion period used to be the poor relation of Anglo-Saxon burial archaeology. There are comparatively fewer sites and even fewer objects, which make dating and classification difficult. However, in recent years scholars, including Dawn Hadley, Victoria Thompson and Andrew Reynolds, have successfully combined evidence from material culture and written sources for the study of burial practices in late Anglo-Saxon England.² The archaeological evidence from burial places and funerary rites in the post-Conversion transition period seems to suggest that there was little change. Historians, however, assume that the introduction of Christianity must have resulted in fundamental changes in this society which would have affected the way in which the dead are spaced and buried as well.

The division of Anglo-Saxon England into a pre- and post-Conquest period is fraught with difficulties. Some of this is linked to the expectation that the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons led to some form of coherent identity. For example, many archaeologists and historians accept that pre-Christian England was inhabited by different groups and composed of rival territories.³ Evidence for such differences is sought primarily in the burial context of early medieval England. The period after the Conversion, for a lack of discernible differences, is often treated as a mono-ethnic quasi-nation,⁴ where incoming groups (such as ‘the Vikings’) are regarded as an automatic threat to ‘English’ identity, and where

¹ The most famous of early archaeologists is arguably the Rev. Bryan Faussett, who excavated what he thought to be ‘Roman’ graves in the eighteenth century; *Inventorium Sepulchrale: an account of some antiquities dug up at Gilton, Kingston, Sibertswold, Barfriston, Beakesbourne, Chartham and Crundale in the county of Kent, from AD 1757 to AD 1773*, ed. Charles Road Smith (London, 1857). It was Faussett’s editor, Charles Road Smith who identified the artefacts correctly as Anglo-Saxon.

² D. Hadley and J. Buckberry, ‘Caring for the dead in late Anglo-Saxon England’, in: F. Tinti ed., *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 121–47; V. Thompson, *Death and Dying in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004); A. Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England: life and landscape* (Stroud: Tempus, 1999).

³ See, for example, B. Yorke, ‘Political and ethnic identity: a case study of Anglo-Saxon practice’, in: W. Frazer and A. Tyrrell eds., *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 69–89; and in the same volume: J. Moreland, ‘Ethnicity, power and the English’, 23–51 and A. Woolf, ‘Community, identity and kingship in early England’, 91–109.

⁴ To give but one example: Gale Owen-Crocker distinguishes between various ‘ethnic’ variants of dress in the pre-Conversion period, such as ‘Anglian’ or ‘Kentish’ styles, but refers to ‘Anglo-Saxon dress’ in post-Conquest examples (in contrast to ‘Viking’ dress); *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004).

contact with the continent is reduced to 'source study'.⁵ In this milieu the prevailing culture is Christian and as a consequence the influence of the Church may have been much overestimated. The Conversion of the English, just as any other early medieval society, was a complex process. Patrick Geary has deplored the assumptions made about paganism on the basis of 'half-understood habits'.⁶ Unfortunately, 'pagan' is often associated with an presumed belief system, and thus 'religious ritual' is often attested where no easy understanding is possible.

In archaeology, as well as in the study of text, structures are an important aspect of the overall analysis. Literature uses imagery, metaphors and metonyms to convey abstract meaning. Graves, too, contain what has been described as a 'symbolic grammar'.⁷ Certain objects and their location around the body are taken as indicators of information on the status and social position ascribed to the deceased in death. This does not necessarily have to be the position that was held by the person in life, since death rituals can be important markers of a transition process. Every death creates a gap within a family or social group, and relations among the living have to be renegotiated. The dead body may be used as a focal point for the reorganisation of the group. For example, the son who has lost his father may find himself in the role of the head of family, which will change his status and responsibilities in his community. Since he has 'inherited' this role from the dead, the first act of this new position may be during the arrangement of the funeral.

Additionally the body of the dead can be used to display the wealth and status of a community. For example, the richest grave at the cemetery at Sewerby, East Yorkshire, contained three ungulate ribs near the head of the inhumation of a young woman.⁸ In a society where sheep are a dominant species in the economy, this should raise questions about the meaning of such depositions. Is it possibly a reference to her occupation as someone who bred sheep? Was this representative of the value associated with her position – similar to the listing of food stuffs that were due to certain groups of society as described in later text sources, such as *Gerefa*?

Grave archaeology allows us to glimpse the attitudes of the living towards their dead, but also towards themselves. The status of the living may be measured in the kind of funeral they afforded to their dead. At the same time grave goods may illustrate the place that the deceased held within the community. In 1988 Arnold estimated that around 25,000 pre-Christian burials from the Anglo-Saxon period have been excavated.⁹ These include inhumations as well as cremations, and the

⁵ There is however some exciting new research in archaeology, such as Chris Loveluck's evaluation of Flixborough (English Heritage, forthcoming). Loveluck is interested in the comparative economic and cultural developments across the North Sea.

⁶ Geary, *Living with the Dead*, 31.

⁷ See Pader, *Symbolism*; also: N. Stoodley, *The Spindle and the Spear: a critical enquiry into the construction of meaning and gender in early Anglo-Saxon burial rite*, BAR British Series 288 (Oxford, 1999).

⁸ Crabtree, 'Symbolic role of animals', 22. 'Ungulate' refers to sheep or goat bones, since these are difficult to tell apart.

⁹ C. Arnold, *An Archaeology of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Routledge, 1988), 142.

number of excavated burials must have increased substantially in the last decade. The analysis of burials is not without difficulty: what is unearthed is subject to an interpretation that is limited by our knowledge of historical circumstances.¹⁰ We also have little knowledge of who buried the dead and who maintained their burial places.¹¹

The increase of additional scientific methods that were not available to earlier excavators may skew our data, since, for example, in the absence of detailed zooarchaeological examinations of cremation urns, some of the bones of larger mammals have been mistakenly identified as human.¹² Animal bone was incorporated either as a whole or in parts in inhumations and cremations alike. Vessels occasionally contain residues from food and drink, but more often appear to have been placed in the grave as a symbol. Often artefacts have been disturbed or destroyed by subsequent activity, so that the find is divorced from its context. Additionally, the emphasis on precious objects in early excavations may have resulted in the loss of much organic material. It is unfortunate that this valuable information has been destroyed before artefacts have reached museums.¹³ However, the methods for sampling and analysis of organic remains have improved immeasurably in the last fifty years.

Evidence from graves, however, is not limited only by decay, but also by the peculiarities of Anglo-Saxon burial rites. Only early graves from the period 450–650, which were overwhelmingly pagan, contain grave goods. The transition period begins with the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons from 597 onwards by Augustine and Celtic missionaries. Over the course of time Christian burials moved towards an internment *intra muros*, close to churches and saintly relics. This, as Dawn Hadley and Victoria Thompson have shown, was a long-drawn-out process, with many twists and turns that have resulted in a great variety of burial places and options in the interim period.¹⁴ Graves located around Anglo-Saxon churches may remain undetected because they are obscured by subsequent additional structures. The bodies of Anglo-Saxons may have been

¹⁰ Boddington, 'From bones to population', 180–97.

¹¹ H. Geake, 'The control of burial practice in Anglo-Saxon England', in: M. Carver ed., *The Cross goes North: processes of conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300–1300* (York: York Medieval Press, 2003), 259–69.

¹² J. Bond, 'Appendix I: the cremated animal bone', in: McKinley ed., *Spong Hill, Part VIII*, 135.

¹³ W. Janssen, 'Essen und Trinken', 327:

Sieht man die Veröffentlichungen über frühgeschichtliche Reihengräberfriedhöfe einmal durch, so fällt auf, daß in vielen Fällen noch nicht einmal die Frage gestellt wird, ob die Gefäße in den Gräbern z.B. Reste von Speisen enthalten. Dazu trägt manchmal auch die Praxis der Ausgräber bei, in den Gräbern vorgefundene Gefäße möglichst umgehend gründlich reinigen zu lassen, wobei etwaige Speiserückstände ausgewaschen werden und für immer verloren gehen.

'Looking through publications on early historic row grave cemeteries it is apparent that in many cases there was not even the question of whether the vessels found in the graves may have contained possible food residues. Additionally, the custom of many excavators of thoroughly cleaning such objects found in burials almost immediately, means that potential food residues are washed away and lost forever.'

¹⁴ D. Hadley, 'Burial practice in Northern England in the later Anglo-Saxon period', in: Lucy and Reynolds eds., *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, 209–28; Thompson, 'Constructing Salvation: a homiletic and penitential context for late Anglo-Saxon burial practice', in: Lucy and Reynolds, *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, 229–40.

reburied when churches were extended and thus can no longer be distinguished from later skeletal remains. Indeed, the dating of burials without grave goods is complicated and often only a very loose time-frame may be given.

It appears that the 'final phase' of pagan Anglo-Saxon burials sees an intensification of rites for elaborate burials.¹⁵ The major graves, such as Taplow (Buckinghamshire), Sutton Hoo (Suffolk), Snape (Suffolk) and the recently discovered grave at Prittlewell (Essex) all fall within this period. These graves are often more elaborate than earlier graves of Anglo-Saxon England. Despite the fact that residues of some kind were found in a pottery bottle with the Sutton Hoo ship burial in mound 1, dated to around 625 by coin evidence,¹⁶ food remains in such containers are usually rather sparse. Finds from pagan Germanic inhumation sites elsewhere revealed an impressive array of meat deposits. Here, food and drink deposits, or associated objects, seem to be more plentiful after the sixth century. Scandinavian examples include burial 7 at Valsgärde, Sweden, dated to the seventh century, which included various pieces of meat, or the tenth-century grave at Jelling (Denmark), where a woman was buried with a strainer in her hand,¹⁷ drinking horns and also a joint of lamb.¹⁸ The ninth-century Oseberg ship burial (Westfold, Norway) accommodated two women, and contained two whole oxen and an array of food stuffs, as well as a bucket of crab-apples. On the Continent, Frankish row graves often included containers with food, and in the Alamannic region many graves contained eggs, the legs and feet of pigs, beef joints and fowl. Food deposits at Continental cemeteries before the sixth century are rare, and they tend to peter out after the first half of the eighth century.¹⁹ Thus the seventh century on the Continent was the period of ample food deposits in graves, and, according to Walter Janssen, these mirrored the eating habits of the upper stratum of society in Merovingian times.²⁰

One of the most intriguing aspects of early Anglo-Saxon burial archaeology is that animal remains in cremations and inhumations appear to differ significantly from those found at settlements.²¹ This may be partly owing to the fact that most settlements excavated are dated to the later, post-Conversion period. A near contemporaneous comparison has been made by Pam Crabtree between the

¹⁵ The term 'princely burial' generally denotes a very high-status grave.

¹⁶ S. Youngs, 'The pottery bottle', in: R. Bruce-Mitford *et al.* eds., *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, 3 vols (London: British Museum Publications, 1975–83), 3:II, 597–610, at 604.

¹⁷ Metal strainers have been found in wealthy Anglo-Saxon burials, too. One of these burials is the bed burial of a young woman at Swallowcliffe Down, Wiltshire; G. Speake ed., *A Saxon Bed Burial on Swallowcliffe Down* (London: Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, 1989). Strainers are supposed to have filtered away any residual remains when the wine was poured. These implements, like the Christening spoons in the ship burial mound 1 at Sutton Hoo, are difficult to explain. It is not known whether they were given for their aesthetic value, or placed deliberately as a sign of status. In the Anglo-Saxon context, strainers are usually found with wealthy female inhumations, which may be a reference to their role as hostess. For the Jelling excavations, see: K. Krogh, 'The royal Viking-age monument at Jelling in the light of recent archaeological examinations: a preliminary report', *Acta Archaologica* 53 (1982), 183–216.

¹⁸ Enright, *Lady*, 101.

¹⁹ Janssen, 'Essen und Trinken', 328.

²⁰ Janssen, 'Essen und Trinken', 329.

²¹ Crabtree, 'Symbolic role of animals', 25.

sixth-century contexts from the settlement at West Stow and bones from the cremation cemetery at Spong Hill, and she has shown that there are marked differences. For example, the quantity of sheep/goat bones is much higher at the settlements, but the number of pigs is slightly more frequent in cremation urns. Horses and dogs predominate in the grave context.²²

To understand the possible meanings of food and drink as part of the grave inventory, this chapter will look at the distribution of animal remains, and the following chapter will examine the context of containers in burials, since they do not often contain food and thus are a different category. Ideally such an examination would make use of a large-scale database, which could collect evidence from all pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon cemeteries excavated for comparison, but this is a major project in itself. Sites included here have been chosen on the basis of evidence for food and drink, but also because they represent a chronological and geographical cross-section of cemeteries.

CREMATIONS

The distinction of the often small and charred cremated bone into human or animal categories is often difficult for the untrained eye, which may explain why early recoveries focused mainly on the shape and decoration of the urn rather than its organic content.²³ Cremation was practised particularly by the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlers (AD 400–500). Whether this was a necessity, since these societies were still in the process of settling into their new homeland and may have regarded themselves still as migratory, or whether cremation is, as Howard Williams seems to suggest,²⁴ a continuation of a tradition practised in the Anglo-Saxon homelands, is hard to tell.²⁵

Cremation burial continues to be practised in Eastern England until the seventh century. The change of burial mode also seems to incur a significant break in the spacing of the dead: cremation cemeteries were often extensive, which indicates that they were communal spaces, possibly shared by a number of settlements.²⁶ Inhumation sites are smaller, which suggests that they serve smaller sections of

²² Crabtree, *Symbolic role of animals*, 24, fig. 3.

²³ Crabtree advises caution when regarding older excavation reports without zooarchaeological expertise, since many animal bones (particularly larger beasts) in cremation urns were presumed to be human; 'Symbolic role of animals', 21.

²⁴ Williams, 'Death warmed up: the agencies of bodies and bones in early Anglo-Saxon cremation rites', *Journal of Material Science* 9 (2004), 263–91, at 286.

²⁵ Williams claims that the discussion of the kind of identity expressed through cremating the dead goes back as far as the nineteenth-century scholar John Kemble. Williams rejects the idea that cremation is an expression of specific ethnic interests, but acknowledges that it may be a powerful statement by individuals and groups of their political and ideological affinity with Northern Europe; 'Remains of pagan Saxondom? – The study of Anglo-Saxon cremation rites', in: Lucy and Reynolds eds., *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, 47–71.

²⁶ Nevertheless, there seems to be some form of discrimination in cremation sites as well. At the Norfolk cemetery of Spong Hill very young infants seem to be underrepresented in the demography of the dead; McKinley, *Spong Hill, Part VIII*, 69. In the light of an expected high infant mortality in early medieval Europe, there appear to have too few infant skeletons at some Anglo-Saxon sites.

the population, which may be individual villages, or may even be reserved for members of a leading elite, as, for example the burial mounts at Sutton Hoo. Inhumation sites often have distinct special arrangements, where focal graves are surrounded by less well-furnished inhumations. Correlation between these graves has been interpreted as relating to kin groups or status.²⁷ The social and chronological subdivisions of cremation cemeteries are more complex still, since urns are often densely packed.

In some cemeteries cremation and inhumation seem to occur side-by-side, which is even more puzzling. Sometimes there are distinct areas for cremation burial, such as at the Anglo-Saxon predominantly sixth-century cemetery of Butler's Field (Lechlade, Gloucestershire), where cremations urns are clustered in the south-east corner,²⁸ but in a number of cases urns were placed into the grave, as for example cremation 165 at Berinsfield, Wally Corner (Oxfordshire), which was placed into the backfill of G 122, which contained the burial of a child.²⁹ The calcinated bone in the urn could no longer be aged or sexed (in fact it is not clear whether it is human at all). The relationship between the cremated and interred bodies in such double burials is perplexing: could these be dead ancestors carried across a new cemetery? Is there a blood relationship between these people, or are these other members of the community who are not afforded the effort of their own grave? It is unlikely that this is simply a statement of wealth, since the incineration of the body takes some considerable effort and resources (fuel). Additionally, many urns contain evidence for grave goods, whereas 'poor' inhumations are often deduced from an absence of goods and shallow graves.

The cremation of the body takes up to ten hours.³⁰ It is uncertain what happened during this time. Was this a public spectacle and would onlookers have observed the transformation of the corpse, or was there a custodian, who would arrange and oversee the cremation of the corpse, just as in modern incinerations? Who collected the ashes, which had to be collected after cooling down? Similarly it is unclear who attended the subsequent burial of the cremation urn and associated goods. The absence of pyres in Anglo-Saxon cremation cemeteries has led scholars to the assumption that the burning of the body may have taken place away from the cemetery,³¹ before the remains were carefully gathered and placed into the urn, which was then taken to the cemetery to be buried. It is impossible to tell whether mourners were present any stage of the process, or whether some form of funerary rite took place prior to the burning of the body.

Even if it is uncertain whether some form of vigil or wake took place in the presence of the body, it is clear that the dead were prepared for the pyre: they were fully clothed and surrounded by grave goods, evident by the finds of charred and congealed remains that were mixed with the body parts. Yet not all artefacts were

²⁷ Stoodley, *Spindle and Spear*.

²⁸ A. Boyle, D. Miles and S. Palmer eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Butler's Field, Lechlade, Gloucestershire*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford Archaeological Unit, 1998), 38.

²⁹ A. Boyle, A. Dodd, D. Miles and A. Mudd, *Two Oxfordshire Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries: Berinsfield and Didcot*, Thames Valley Landscape Monograph 8 (Oxford: Oxford Archaeological Unit, 1995), 108.

³⁰ Williams, 'Death warmed up', 271.

³¹ Williams, 'Death warmed up', 280; McKinley, *Spong Hill, Part VIII*, 74–5.

burnt with the body. For example, at the Norfolk cemetery of Spong Hill 201 new grave goods were recovered from the over 2,000 cremation urns found at this site. The inclusions of grave goods was common at Spong Hill, around 85 percent of female and 70 per cent of male burials contained artefacts.³²

The amount of animal remains from Anglo-Saxon cremation sites is impressive and indicates that animals played a significant role in the burial of the dead. Nearly half of the cremation urns at Sancton (East Yorkshire) contained animal bone. At Spong Hill, animal remains were identified in 43 percent of cremations, and at Baston (Lincolnshire) almost a third of urns fell into this category.³³ Not all species found at Spong Hill can be associated with food; there is, for example, a sizeable quantity of dog bones (identified with 25 cremations).³⁴ Water voles, frogs and mice, which are occasionally found with inhumations, should also be regarded as intrusions. The main species found with the cremations at Spong Hill were horse and sheep.³⁵ This is not surprising in the case of sheep, since, as has been mentioned before, they were a popular species in east England, according to bone assemblages found at early settlement sites.³⁶ However, at the multi-period settlement site of Spong Hill, which is situated in the immediate vicinity of the cemetery, sheep bones were only the second-largest species recovered from the debris in the sunken-floor buildings.³⁷ The largest group recovered from this context was cattle. An even more striking difference in the animal bone found with the cremations, is that only small numbers of pig and horse bones were found at the settlement. It is clear that these animals were eaten at some stage, since there are plenty of butchery marks on the bone. Not all animals may have been taken apart for food preparation: it has been observed that the bones from large beasts, such as cattle, showed plenty of evidence for slaughter, whereas sheep remains had remarkably few marks. The horse bones, as well, showed signs of butchery, which indicates that horsemeat may have been part of the diet.

Jacqueline McKinley, who has examined the animal bone from Spong Hill, has suggested that the function of animal bone at the site falls into three categories: first, there are horses and dogs which were placed whole on the pyre and which were not meant as food offerings, but as status markers. In the second group, which she classifies as food offerings, are sheep, cattle and pig. McKinley disallows for the fact that these may have been part of a funerary feast, since no knife marks are found on the bones. In her third category are the remains of 'wild' animals, such as bird claws and bear phalanges, which she classes as amulets.³⁸

Tim Pestell also doubts that such remains are part of funerary feasting, on the

³² McKinley, *Spong Hill, Part VIII*, 88.

³³ McKinley, *Spong Hill, Part VIII*, 92.

³⁴ McKinley, *Spong Hill, Part VIII*, 92.

³⁵ McKinley, *Spong Hill, Part VIII*, 92, table 5. It should be pointed out that 'sheep' denotes both sheep and goats, since their bones are very difficult to distinguish. At Spong Hill some of the animals have been identified by size, so that 'sheep size' could include pigs and roe deer as well.

³⁶ Crabtree, 'Animal exploitation', 40–54; Crabtree, *West Stow*.

³⁷ J. Bond, 'Animal bone from Early Saxon sunken-featured buildings and pits', in: R. Rickett ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham Part VII: the Iron Age, Roman and Early Saxon settlement*, EAA 73 (1995), 142–6.

³⁸ McKinley, *Spong Hill, Part VIII*, 96–7.

basis that the bones in cremations show no butchery marks.³⁹ However, there is at least one possible instance of butchery marks on a horse bone at Spong Hill (in cremation 2778).⁴⁰ Julie Bond, who has analysed the animal bone from this site, does not regard these cut marks as a form of food preparation, but sees them as a means of cutting the large animal down for the pyre. Butchery marks were found on animal remains from the cremation cemetery Sancton I,⁴¹ and it is feasible that at least a number of the animals were not placed as a whole on the pyre. It is hardly surprising that potential food for a funerary feast may not be cooked where the dead body is cremated. Some animals, such as small pigs and chicken, can be roasted whole on a spit, which does not require butchering at all. Unless animal bone is fused to human remains by the heat from the fire, there is always the possibility that cooking and feasting took place elsewhere and that the remains were collected and placed into the urn, as a token of the ritual. The problem of establishing whether funerary feasting took place is not helped by the fact that only parts of the cremated bone, both human and animal, were collected in the urns.

In a few cases animal bone is not mixed with the human remains, but deposited separately in an accessory vessel. At least 1.3 percent of the cremations at Spong Hill have been furnished in this way.⁴² Since grave goods are supposed to have been displayed and burned on the pyre, apart from a few smaller extra deposits, the purpose of such added vessels is not quite clear. McKinley's research shows that they contain a variety of species in a number of cases, which is in strong contrast to mixed human–animal cremation urns, which in all but one case contain one species only. For example, the accessory vessel to G 1911, which contained the ashes of a young woman, was furnished with horse, sheep, pig and cattle bones, as well as some unidentified bone.⁴³

Howard Williams suggests that the animals buried with the dead have an impact on the way in which of the dead function as enhancers of social memory.⁴⁴ To my knowledge there is no indication that the cremated beasts were past their prime, so that they would have been 'disposable' in some form. In terms of wealth, the incineration of whole cattle, horses and even sheep is a significant investment in the dead, which are comparable to other expensive grave goods. It is not surprising that they seem to have clear age connotations, since children will have not have possessed the same wealth as their adult peers. The analysis of animal bone from Spong Hill shows that it was more frequently deposited with adolescents and adults than with young children. At most inhumation and

³⁹ W. Filmer-Sankey and T. Pestell, *Snape Anglo-Saxon Cemetery*, EAA 95 (Ipswich: Suffolk County Council, 2001), 258.

⁴⁰ Bond, 'Appendix 1: The cremated animal bone', in: McKinley, *Spong Hill, Part VIII*, 123.

⁴¹ J. Bond, 'Burnt offerings: animal bones in Anglo-Saxon cremations', *World Archaeology* 28 (1996), 76–88, at 82.

⁴² McKinley, *Spong Hill, Part VIII*, 93.

⁴³ McKinley, *Spong Hill, Part VIII*, 93–4. Williams writes that there are no 'certain' female burials with animal accessory vessels; H. Williams, 'Animals, ashes and ancestors', in A. Pluskowski ed., *Just Skin and Bones? New perspectives on human–animal relations in the historical past*, BAR International Series 1410 (2005), 19–40, at 33.

⁴⁴ Williams, 'Animals, ashes and ancestors', 19.

cremation cemeteries very young children are buried with only few objects.⁴⁵ There are some exceptions, but many children's graves in both inhumation and cremation are poorly furnished. This is not callousness on the part of their family, but may be representative of their position as not yet being in charge of disposable goods. In the few cases of elaborately furnished burials, we should consider whether these children may have been the eldest sibling or only child and therefore in possession of a larger amount of inheritance. There has been a long-standing debate about 'missing children' in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries,⁴⁶ since the number of infant burials is presumed to be too low at Anglo-Saxons sites. Apart from the possibility that the Anglo-Saxons may have been more healthy than we think and better obstetricians, we should also consider that only certain children may have been buried in adult spaces.

A number of urns at the Spong Hill cemetery contained more than one species, in five cases with even more than four different animals. In these multi-animal representations horse and sheep/goat were the most popular combination, followed by horse and cattle.⁴⁷ In the urns containing single bones, sheep or goat are the most popular species, followed by pig depositions. The question of which animal is included in the cremation urn is apparently gender- and age-related, since 'female' objects, such as bone rings, appear most frequently with pig bones, whereas gender-neutral objects, such as combs, are most likely to occur in the combination with sheep/goat.⁴⁸

The remains from cremation urns at the early Anglo-Saxon cremation cemetery at Elsham, East Yorkshire have been analysed by Julian Richards. The residues of 131 animals were found among the 630 burials, which is representative of approximately 20 percent of all graves.⁴⁹ The survival of bone is always dependent on aspects of preservation, analyses of animal remains having shown that where conditions are favourable, the proportion of animal bone may be as high as four in ten.⁵⁰ Richards concludes that the animals in the cremation deposits at Elsham do not represent ritualistic feasts, because some species were found only with certain groups of people, and must therefore be status-orientated. Each species category was either age- or gender-specific. The animal bone examination from Elsham has shown that the chief animals represented at this site were boar, cattle, horse and sheep. Richards notes that sheep bones were the most likely animal remains to be found in Anglo-Saxon cremation burials. The amount of sheep bone found in cremations with adult and child burials is nearly the same, with a slightly higher percentage in the group of children. Cattle and horse bones, however, were exclusively buried with adult cremations, and pigs as well are rarely found with child cremations.⁵¹ Males are more likely to have been buried

⁴⁵ S. Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 19–32, especially 31.

⁴⁶ See Crawford, *Childhood*, 24 for a discussion.

⁴⁷ Williams, 'Animals, ashes and ancestors', 28, fig. 3.11.

⁴⁸ Williams, 'Animals, ashes and ancestors', 30, figs 3.13 and 3.14.

⁴⁹ Richards, 'Anglo-Saxon symbolism', 138.

⁵⁰ Richards, 'Anglo-Saxon symbolism', 138.

⁵¹ Richards, 'Anglo-Saxon symbolism', 140, fig. 21.

with animal remains than females. Horses in particular have a male bias (in the ratio of approximately 4:1). Sheep and cattle remains are almost twice as likely to be buried with men as women. Only pig bones have a near equal distribution between the sexes, the figures being only slightly higher for males.⁵² Richards claims that these findings, with the exception of horse bones, reflect the relative importance of animals in settlement assemblages. The predominant species among the Elsham cremations is sheep: forty-nine sheep remains were found, in comparison to thirty-seven from horses, eleven from cattle, thirteen from pig, three bird and one deer.⁵³ This is congruent with observations on the importance of sheep rearing at early Anglo-Saxon rural settlements in Eastern England, such as West Stow and Brandon.⁵⁴ At other sites, such as Mucking,⁵⁵ cattle bones are more frequent.

In a number of cases cremation urns are lined up in rows, and there may be certain family or kin connections in the spatial arrangement. Bone preservation, as expected, is usually not very good, but it is hoped that DNA analysis from collagen residues will give us further clues on who was buried in these cemeteries. There have been moves to identify certain social or ethnic markers from cremation urns. Julian Richards, for example, has shown that vessels with applied decoration are much more likely to also contain animal bone.⁵⁶ Tall pots are also linked to animal depositions, although this is less so for sheep.⁵⁷

The dominant species can vary from site to site, both with cremations and inhumations. For example, in a comparison of four Anglo-Saxon cemetery sites surveyed by Richards, sheep predominated at Elsham, Illington (East Anglia) and Newark (Nottinghamshire), but not at Loveden Hill (Lincolnshire), where sheep and bird bones were found in equal numbers. Horse and dog bones occur more frequently with cremations than at settlement sites.

It is not always obvious whether the animal bone deposits from cremation and inhumation cemeteries were regarded as symbolic food, or had a different meaning, such as representing a riding animal or hunting companion.⁵⁸ Dog bones should surely not count as food animals, but horses may have been part of the food chain as well. It is possible that the Anglo-Saxons consumed some animals which today would be considered inedible, and which may make an appearance in graves as well. Anne Hagen has suggested that badger was possibly eaten, but since her evidence comes from a medical text, based on the Latin *Liber de taxone*, no direct case can be made.⁵⁹ Beaver teeth sometimes appear as

⁵² Richards, 'Anglo-Saxon symbolism', 140, fig. 22.

⁵³ Richards, 'Anglo-Saxon symbolism', 139.

⁵⁴ Crabtree, 'Symbolic role of animals', 23.

⁵⁵ See chapter 1 for bone stratification at this site.

⁵⁶ Richards, *Significance of Forms*, 200.

⁵⁷ Richards, *Significance of Forms*, 200.

⁵⁸ D. Sergeantson, 'The animal bones', in: V. Evison ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Great Chesterford*, Essex, CBA Research Report 91 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1994), 66–70.

⁵⁹ H. De Vriend ed., *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, EETS OS 286 (Oxford: OUP, 1984), 234–6; see also Hagen, *Second Handbook*, 132.

amulets in pagan Anglo-Saxon graves, and they must clearly have symbolised something other than food stuff.⁶⁰

It is difficult to say precisely what animal remains in burials signify, but it is even more puzzling when they occur outside the grave context. In some Anglo-Saxon cemeteries animals are deposited outside the container for the body, or even outside the grave. In the case of dog remains, as in the case of an unassociated canine burial at Great Chesterford,⁶¹ this may have been a valued pet, but the burial of cow remains needs some explanation. A single ox-head was buried among inhumations and cremations at the Cambridgeshire cemetery of Soham, and a cremation urn rested on an ox or horse skull at Caistor-by-Norwich (Norfolk).⁶²

Detailed comparisons of the large body of cremation urns are still outstanding and no large-scale comparative study of decoration, content and bone residues in funerary urns has been made to date. Butchery marks seem to suggest that some of the bones in the cremation urns have come from meat cuts, and perhaps they are the residues of a feast that was celebrated with the dead; this may not have taken place at the pyre or graveside, but could have occurred elsewhere. Howard Williams's assumption that the mourners observed the cremation ritual requires for them to be present at the pyre.⁶³ If this is the case then ten hours are a long time to look at the flames, and perhaps the idea of refreshment is not so far-fetched at all. It may even have been regarded as part of the dead person's legacy. In any case, what happened in the twilight zone between life and death remains open to debate.

INHUMATIONS

Changes in burial rites may have also resulted in differences in the way animal bone was deposited. Large animals do not fit easily into graves, and some effort is required when they are interred whole. Inhumation burials also have the advantage that the grave goods are highly visible until the moment the grave is closed, unlike cremation pyres, where the view may be obstructed by the flames or smoke. As with cremations, inhumations have a large variety of species that were buried with the dead, and these come in all forms and shapes, suggesting that in some cases a 'short-hand' reminder was enough as a representation of the animal in question.

This can range from animal teeth to the careful deposition of a pot containing three eggs in an otherwise poorly furnished grave at Great Chesterford (G 121). Depositions in containers are intriguing, since they link the use of such items to

⁶⁰ Audrey Meaney has described teeth amulets in detail. She supposes that these were symbolic rather than functional and may have been part of the funerary rite; *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*, BAR British Series 96 (Oxford, 1981), 138.

⁶¹ Evison, *Great Chesterford*, 29.

⁶² G. Owen, *Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1981), 45.

⁶³ Williams, 'Death warmed up', 277.

eating and drinking. There are only few instances in which fish bone has been found at cemeteries, but a hanging bowl was deposited with the bones from three eels in a copper-alloy bowl (*Perlrandbecken*) at the King's Garden Hostel cemetery (Cambridge).⁶⁴ Copper alloy bowls are associated with feasting and are classed as high-status goods.⁶⁵ Apart from this bowl, there are no other tell-tale high-status goods. The fill of the grave, as well as that of three others at this site (out of 21 inhumations), contained animal bone, in addition to charcoal, which is regarded as intrusive.⁶⁶ At other sites copper-alloy hanging bowls have been found to contain fruit, oysters or meat deposits.⁶⁷

As noted with animal deposit in cremation burials, there seems to be a gendering of species type, albeit with a different result. At many sites we can see a correlation between female graves and sheep bones. In fact, at Edix Hill the only grave with recognisable animal bone is the lavish bed burial of a young woman with leprosy (G 18B), dated to the second phase of the cemetery (seventh century). Sheep in this region, as has been observed before, do not seem to be the predominant species, so that the inclusion may have been regarded as special. Sheep are also producers of wool, and in the case of the woman from Edix Hill, she is buried with a weaving sword as well. Textile implements may not indicate a fondness for cloth-making in life, but may signify an aspect of female manufacture. Textile production seems to have been women's work, and those who oversaw the production and may have even commanded some surplus from it may have been credited with this status in death.

DISTRIBUTION OF ANIMAL BONE

The study of the stratification of grave deposits has recently become significant for the analysis of graves. I will look at two cemeteries in detail, Castledyke South in North Lincolnshire and Butler's Field in Lechlade (Gloucestershire). Some 16 percent of graves at Castledyke South contained animal bone, which is a higher than average figure for Anglo-Saxon graveyards. The cemetery contained 208 excavated graves,⁶⁸ and animal bone was found with thirty-two inhumations:⁶⁹ it occurred in seventeen seventh-century graves in contrast to nine burials from the sixth century (see Table 1a). Six graves with bone deposits could not be dated.

⁶⁴ Dodwell, Lucy and Tipper, 'Cambridge Backs', 109. The eels were found in G 1, which contained the poorly preserved remains of an approximately 25-year-old woman, who was buried with a knife, bead and spindle-whorl.

⁶⁵ Geake, *Grave Goods in Conversion-Period England*, 88.

⁶⁶ Dodwell, Lucy and Tipper, 'Cambridge Backs', 123.

⁶⁷ Dodwell, Lucy and Tipper, 'Cambridge Backs', 109; Geake, *Grave Goods in Conversion-Period England*, 87.

⁶⁸ There appear to be more graves on the western side of the cemetery, but they are obstructed by overlying buildings.

⁶⁹ All remains, even small parts, have been counted. Osteological sexing has been given preference to sexing by grave goods.

Bare Bones: Animals in Cemeteries

The majority of animal bone remains were found in female graves, but it is quite possible that some of the unsexed burials are those of men.⁷⁰

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Unsexed</i>
6th C	1	5	3
7th C	3	10	4
no date	1	3	2

Table 1a: Distribution of animal bone according to sex, Castledyke South

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Unsexed</i>
6th C	7	18	7
7th C	3	8	4
no date	1	1	3

Table 1b: Distribution of animal bone according to sex, Butler's Field

At Butler's Field (Table 1b) there were more inhumations with animal bone in the sixth century than with later burials, which is not surprising since burials from the earlier period outweigh later inhumations. Again, the number of female inhumations with animal remains was higher than those of males, but at this site there was a higher number of female skeletons than males: from the 199 inhumations, 89 were sexed female and 50 male. However, there is also a large proportion of adolescents, who could not be sexed.⁷¹ At both sites the distribution is complicated by multiple inhumation of different sexes, which compounds the relationship of the bones and the body that has been furnished with it. In the case of Castledyke G 197 there were at least two species (cattle and sheep) among the three disarticulated inhumations. It is possible that each of them was buried with animal bone, or that multiple species were given to just one of them, which had been disturbed by subsequent inhumation. There is much cutting and reusing of graves at some cemeteries, which are also often located on top of Romano-British burial sites. It is always possible that bones were mixed up by later activity.

With this caveat in mind, it is still pertinent to ask: who are the people buried with animal bone? Do they belong to a certain stratum of society or is this some form of gender-related expression? When the species types at Castledyke are categorised, it seems that certain animals could be associated with one or the other sex. This is not always straightforward, since there is a large proportion of

⁷⁰ All statistical evaluations based on small samples should be read with caution. Often osteological analysis of human bone is no longer possible and grave goods can be highly misleading. Since many Anglo-Saxon graves are multiple inhumations or come from graves that were reused, the possibility of 'accidental' goods should be borne in mind. Modern excavation methods are much more precise and the question of sex and gendering has become important, so that future work will shed more light on the issue of grave deposit and sex. Because of the paucity of empirical data large-scale conclusions from one site should be avoided.

⁷¹ Dimorphic traits are less pronounced in adolescents than adults.

unsexed graves and it is a very small sample.⁷² It appears that pig bones were found exclusively with females, but dog was only found in male inhumations. Fowl and cattle were found mostly in male graves, but horse remains were distributed equally between the sexes. In contrast to other sites cattle bones were not found in graves with overtly male connotations.

If these observations are compared with evidence from Butler's Field, then cattle are again more likely to be buried with women than men (9 female inhumations in contrast to 3 male), but in the comparative age groups, it appears that cattle are more often given to young people than those over 35 years of age.⁷³ Female graves contain the larger percentage of animal bone for all species at Butler's Field, apart from horse bones which are found equally distributed between one juvenile, a young male and a young woman. The most frequent species with female burials is sheep. A comparison of species and age distribution as Castledyke (see Fig. 1) reveals that sheep were not given to older women, and that pig was not interred with children. Apart from one example (G 165), fowl seems to be associated with the age group of the 35- to 45-year-olds (mature adults) and cattle are reserved for adults. Burial with sheep remains occurs with the category of young men, whereas other species seem to appear with older individuals. We apparently do have a 'grammar' according to which such deposits were distributed, but we can only make tentative assumptions about its interpretation.

Burial position

The graves at Castledyke containing animal bone display a 'choreography'. This means a distinct pattern in which the body and objects are laid out in the grave, and which must have been meaningful to those who buried the dead, and which may reflect a locally defined tradition. Such choreographies are not unique, being found at other pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon cemeteries as well. They underline that the display of the dead contained meaning for those who attended the funeral, and that such elements could be 'read' by the mourners. Often the same objects are found at similar locations on or around the body. At Great Chesterford pots, which are mainly globular vessels, were placed by the skull, mainly to the right, but sometimes overlying or underlying the head. Other vessels, such as glass beakers, buckets and bowls are found on the left side of the body, and not necessarily near the head. Animal bone occurs in various positions. It seems that the position of the pot may be the determining aspect, since the burial of young male in G 33, for example, contained animal bone in a glass vessel that in other places occurs on the left, but instead it was deposited at the right side of the shoulder together with a pot. One of the most interesting burials at Great Chesterford is that of the middle-aged woman in G 55, who was buried with the skeleton of a goose

⁷² I have followed the data from the grave catalogue. In the analysis of the data Gail Drinkall claims that domestic birds were deposited on the right side of adult women, but the sex is doubtful in all but one case in the grave catalogue, *Castledyke South*, 332.

⁷³ This includes four children of indeterminable sex. Generally there is no universal paradigm for the representation of age groups in archaeological reports. An adult at one site is an adolescent at others.

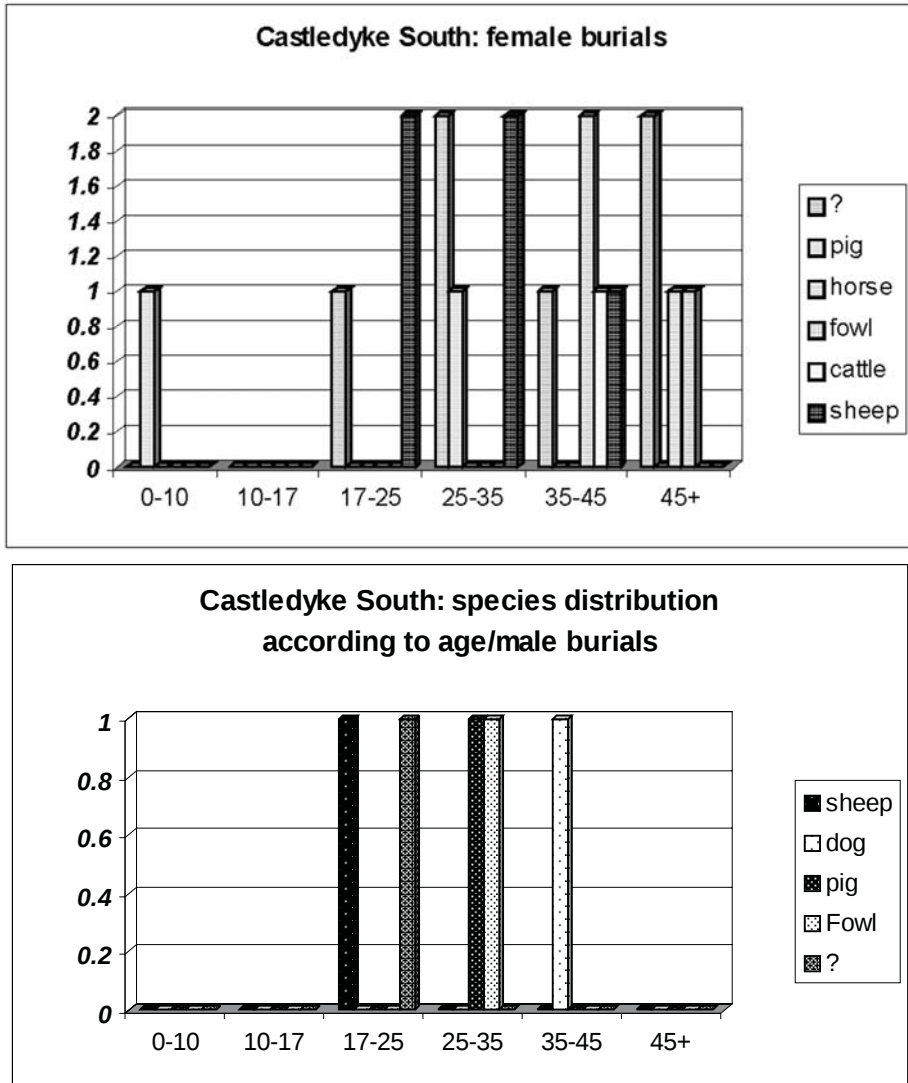


Fig. 1 Species and age distribution, Castledyke South

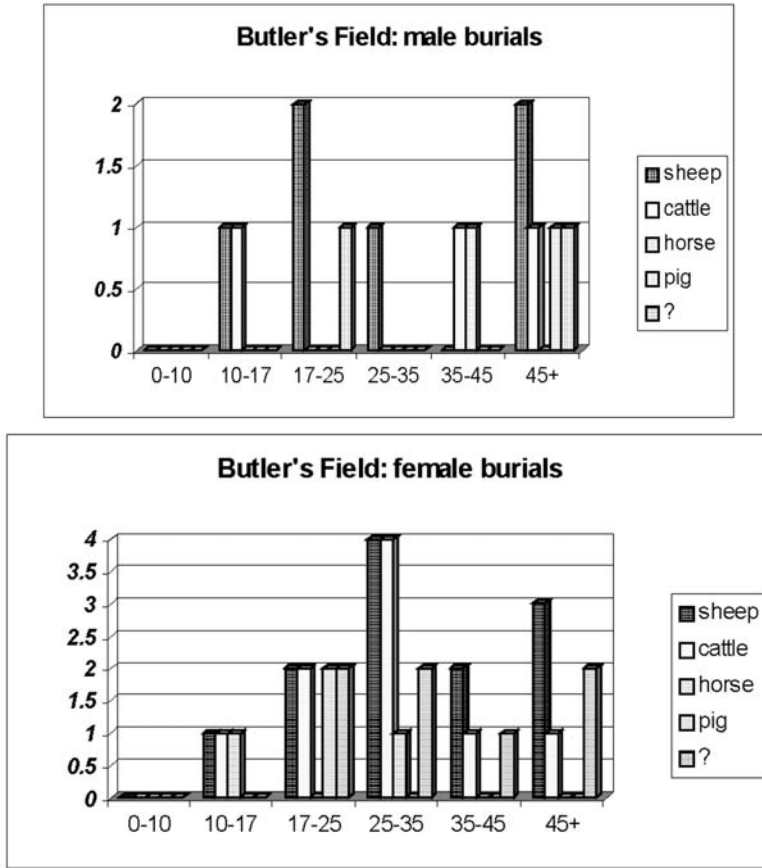


Fig. 2 Correlation between animal bone remains and age in graves, Butler's Field
Note that only graves with gender associations have been used to produce Figures 1 and 2.

at the left elbow. This was one of the earliest inhumations, but the grave is cut at the foot end by the horse burial H 1, which contained the remains of one complete part-cremated animal, covered in wood. The graves are almost arranged as mirror images, so that the heads of the woman and that of the animal lie in opposite directions. A red high-shouldered pot is placed exactly over the point where the graves intercut, which cannot be accidental.

At the sixth-century Cambridgeshire cemetery at Oakington four inhumations out of twenty-five contained meat bones placed as grave goods.⁷⁴ The burial of a child between the age of 7 and 12 in Grave 9 contained sheep femurs placed on the left side of the skeleton. A pottery sherd was the only other deposit. A woman of about 18 years (G 18) had a sheep femur placed near her left leg. She had a reasonably rich assembly of goods for this site, with an ivory bag ring and a set of

⁷⁴ A. Taylor, C. Duhig and J. Hines, 'An Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Oakington, Cambridgeshire', *PCAS* 86 (1997), 57–60.

latch lifters. The six-year-old child in Grave 23 had a single cattle bone placed between its legs. No other finds were recorded from this inhumation.

It should be evident from these examples of careful placing of deposits that animal bones are not accidental deposits. They contain indications of sex, status and age, which makes them comparable to other grave goods. The deposition of actual food in the grave may have been the result of contacts with the Romano-British populations, who often include food deposits. The most interesting aspect of grave food, which will be discussed below, is the deposits found in the backfill of graves. Out of thirty-six inhumations with animal bone deposits at Castledyke, twelve were actually not found with the body, but in the fill.⁷⁵ One example is the seventh-century crouched inhumation of a female of about twenty-five years at Castledyke, who must have experienced severe back pain,⁷⁶ which included animal bone in the fill (G 31). At Butler's Field the majority of animals remains were found in the fill, as were other objects connected with food and drink, such as parts of pots. It is important to note that some of the graves were not disturbed by intercutting or later burial, nor were they placed above earlier burial grounds, which may explain this position. Instead such deposits suggest that they were tossed into the grave when it was backfilled. If, as has been suggested before, there was a ritual of eating with or in honour of the dead, they may have been part of a funeral meal.⁷⁷ While these findings at first seem to be contradictory to observations of status and species remains (why eat the food that was meant to symbolise aspects of the deceased's social standing?), they may point to an even more complex relation between the living and the dead.

A comparison of species type and posture at Castledyke reveals that sheep and cattle deposits occur predominantly with supine female inhumations, but that pig was only deposited with crouched or semi-crouched burials. A horse tooth was placed in one grave of a woman in a semi-crouched position (G 118). Horse remains are generally associated with high-status inhumations and we would expect an extended supine burial here, but either the horse association is too slight to be significant or the age of the woman determines the choice of burial position. At Castledyke, fowl remains appear with supine or semi-crouched females.

The cemetery at Castledyke South represents the burial plot of a community of around 43 to 60 individuals, which means around four to six families, for a period of two hundred years. Within this community there must have been social differences, which may be mirrored in the grave assemblage. Computer-assisted analysis identified seven graves as high status (five female and two male), and these were spaced evenly across the cemetery.⁷⁸ Food and drink deposits are generally not included in wealth analyses, where grave goods are divided into 'high' or 'low' status objects.

⁷⁵ Such as in the seventh-century graves 31 (female, 25–35), 33b (male, double inhumation, 45+), 132 (male, 45+) and 155 (female, 17–25). All of them were undisturbed by subsequent burials or other activity.

⁷⁶ The first vertebra of the sacrum was not fused. I first tried to establish whether there could have been a correlation between burial position and physiological factors, such as stooping or bending during life, but this proved not to be the case for most samples.

⁷⁷ Bonnie Effros has made a similar argument for pagan Merovingian sites; *Creating a Community*, 89.

⁷⁸ J. Brennan, 'Social structure', in: Drinkall and Foreman, *Castledyke South*, 341–6.

According to R. Nicholson, no clear patterning of animal bone has emerged from Castledyke.⁷⁹ However, when the cemetery is divided into three horizontal strips from north to south, the middle section contains mainly graves with pottery sherds but hardly any animal bone, whereas the north-east corner contains a clustering of bone deposits. This is especially evident in graves 198 B (adult/ juvenile, 7th c.), 180 (male, 35–45, undated), 165 (infant, 3–4, earlier than 7th c.) and 167 B (female, 35–45, 7th c.), which were all buried in one line nearly adjacent to each other and which all contained remains of domestic fowl. This may mark out the as members of the same kin-group, corresponding to Stoodley's observation that cemeteries have designated plots that house the members of such kin groups. In this case all four burials share certain characteristics. All bodies were buried with their legs flexed and none of the graves contained more than four grave goods. In contrast to the many unfurnished children's burials, the infant in G 165 was given pottery and a knife as deposits, as well as the bird (which incidentally was placed not with the body, but in a post hole on the side of the grave).

At Butler's Field no animal bone is found at the east part of the cemetery. Graves at this site seemed to have been laid out in rows in the sixth century, aligned south-west to north-east, with exceptions. In the seventh century graves were inserted, but this time mainly aligned east-west. During the sixth century cattle bones seem mainly to be buried in the outer rows of graves,⁸⁰ whereas the seventh century sees a concentration around the prehistoric barrow.

While animal bone is plentiful at some sites, there are a number of sites where only one of the graves in a cemetery contained animal bone. The only grave with a food offering (animal ribs) at Sewerby (East Yorkshire) was inhumation 49/41, where the body of a young woman was overlain by the prone burial of a middle-aged woman, so that they would face each other.⁸¹ The young female was interred with a multitude of grave goods, among which was also a cauldron, placed at her head. When the grave was backfilled, a wooden vessel was placed on the soil covering the second body, before it was completely filled. Two post holes were also found with this inhumation.⁸² In the case of the only grave with bone (G 120) at West Heslerton, it is not even clear whether this was cremated animal or human bone. This inhumation of a female adult from the middle phase of the cemetery (550–600) overlaying the prone burial of a young girl (G 118) is situated at the southern end of graves from this period, which are clustered around the prehistoric henge structure. The grave is not very well furnished and it is unclear why she should be singled out.⁸³ Examples from Sewerby, West Heslerton and Edix Hill have in common that they are all female burials, which are overlain by either an older or a younger person, which in two cases are also women (in the case of Edix Hill there were two unsexed bodies: a three-year-old child and an adult). In

⁷⁹ Nicholson, 'Animal bone', 240.

⁸⁰ Exceptions are G 39, 139 and 151 (all of them male).

⁸¹ There has been some speculation that the woman was buried alive in the past, but this is contested now.

⁸² S. Hirst, *An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Sewerby, East Yorkshire*, York University Archaeological Publications 4 (York, University of York Press 1985), 39–40.

⁸³ The bone preservation at West Heslerton was poor, and it is, of course possible that there were more graves containing animal deposits that have decayed in the meantime.

every case the body that is buried on top has fewer grave goods, and in two cases these were laid out prone.⁸⁴ In the case of the leprous woman from Edix Hill (G 18B), it is possible that the overlying second adult also suffered from the disease.⁸⁵

What conclusions may be drawn from this small sample? Firstly, that animal bone cannot be studied outside the grave context and may be a component illustrating relationships within such double burials. It may be a sign of dependence where the body that was buried with food remains was ‘feeding’ those buried in the same grave. They may have been members of the same household, or perhaps a landholder and tenant. The sample itself is too small, but the role of food stuff in inhumations needs to be further explored.

REPLACEMENTS?

If animal bone is rejected as a food offering, could the significance of such grave goods be deduced from other objects? Animal husbandry was a major component of the Anglo-Saxon economy, which may explain the importance of animal symbolism in art and also on functional vessels. Almost 80 percent of cremation urns have some form of decoration, and the study of decoration and content may reveal more information about the deceased.⁸⁶ It has been suggested that vessels without decoration may not have served as urns, but were accessory vessels in which food or animal remains were buried with the urns.⁸⁷ Decorations on urns are usually abstract designs, but in a few rare cases there are ‘recognisable’ animals, such as hares, stags or horses.⁸⁸ Urns were supposed to be viewed from above and the decorations seem to ‘frame’ the pot.⁸⁹ As in the case of animal bone in inhumations, which is carefully placed over or beside the body, the animal thus ‘accompanying’ the body is clearly visible to those who observe the funeral. Not all cremation urns that are decorated in this style do contain remains from animal bone as well. For example, G 2594, decorated with what seems to be a herd of deer, includes no such bone, and not even half of the urns decorated with animal stamps from Spong Hill contain animal remains.⁹⁰ For the mourners attending the funeral there would have been no visible difference in the ashes anyway.

⁸⁴ The bodies of the early Anglo-Saxon dead were carefully laid out, but it is still possible that at least some prone burials are accidental. Text and art sources from late Anglo-Saxon England suggest that the body was shrouded, but this is not clear from earlier evidence. ‘Dress pins’ found with some bodies may have functioned as shroud pins. It may be more difficult to see which way the body is facing once it is covered in a shroud.

⁸⁵ Malim and Hines, *Edix Hill*, 52. This skeleton is only 2 per cent complete and not mentioned in the very extensive evaluation of the human bone report by Corinne Duhig.

⁸⁶ Williams, ‘Animals, ashes and ancestors’, 20.

⁸⁷ Williams, ‘Animals, ashes and ancestors’, 20.

⁸⁸ See for example the stamps from group 44 at Spong Hill, in: C. Hills ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham Part V*, EEA 67 (Dereham: Norfolk Museum Service, 1994), 11.

⁸⁹ Williams, ‘Animals, ashes and ancestors’, 25.

⁹⁰ After Williams ‘Animals, ashes and ancestors’, 23, fig. 3.4. Williams, however, seems to count ‘worm-like’ animal stamps in his calculations, which I would not necessarily regard as a recognisable species.

Decoration on the urn may thus be a symbolic marker, which may replace the actual placement of animal bone on the pyre or into the urn.

Animal decoration is mainly found on the metalwork accompanying inhumation burials. Brooches and other ornamental objects are often adorned with animal decoration, though the zoomorphic beasts and griffins have little resemblance to actual species. In the seventh century there are a few 'realistic' depictions, such as the purse mount from mound 1, Sutton Hoo, which depicts two ducks eaten by birds of prey. It is interesting that no animal remains were found under mound 1, Sutton Hoo, despite the fact that excavators especially looked for horse bones.⁹¹ Animal bone, and in a few cases in a variety of species, was found in the cremation burials under mounds 3 (horse), 5 (horse and sheep), 6 (sheep, pig, goat, cattle and possibly horse), 7 (horse, cattle, sheep, pig and red deer) and with the inhumation under mound 17 (sheep),⁹² and while it is feasible that animal bone may have decayed (or even been overlooked by the 1939 excavators), the ship burials under mounds 1 and 2 are also distinguished by a much larger assembly of vessels. It is feasible that actual animals could be replaced through more prestigious animal decoration on precious metalwork.

Animal symbolism has been studied on a variety of objects, but the significance of such objects for the grave assemblage has only recently been prioritised. Tania Dickinson has looked at zoomorphic shield boss decorations and has concluded that these may be 'symbols of protection' on the basis of comparison with gold bracteates, which were found in Scandinavian areas.⁹³ Similarities between Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon iconography have been observed for some time, and appear at various Anglo-Saxon sites.⁹⁴ Dickinson associates the shield decorations with a cult of Óðinn/Woden.⁹⁵ It is undoubtedly true that there must have been an iconography of religious symbols in pre-Christian Britain and Scandinavia, but I would hesitate to identify sixth- and seventh-century Anglo-Saxon ornaments on the basis of twelfth-century Scandinavian (and mainly Icelandic) mythologies. Dickinson's useful classification nonetheless shows that such objects had a regional, as well as gender-based distinction, and points to the variety of meanings that such decorations can convey.

If shield bosses are 'male' artefacts, brooches are predominantly found with female burials. Not all brooches in graves depict some form of animal symbolism, but it is assumed that other decorations, such as swastikas, which are found in sixth-century inhumations, contain a symbolic meaning. It is debatable whether animal decoration on brooches may represent some form of symbolic deposit,

⁹¹ G. Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf and the Structure of the Poem* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 74.

⁹² M. Carver ed., *Sutton Hoo: A seventh-century burial and its context*, Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London 69 (London: British Museum Press, 2005), 11, table 3. The preservation of bone was quite bad in the sandy soil.

⁹³ T. Dickinson, 'Symbols of protection: the significance of animal-ornamented shields in early Anglo-Saxon England', *Med Arch* 49 (2005), 109–63.

⁹⁴ See, for example: J. Hines, *The Scandinavian Character of Anglo-Saxon England*, BAR British Series 124 (Oxford, 1984).

⁹⁵ Dickinson, 'Symbols of protection', 152–3.

placed in the grave instead of the actual beast. Many of the decorations on brooches are rather abstract, but the underlying motif is still recognisable. However, a design can be used for aesthetic effect only and in some cases the artwork shows interesting cross-cultural references, so it may not even represent an English design.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, the aspect of symbolic replacement should not be easily dismissed. Such decoration appears mainly on jewellery, which traditionally is a female accoutrement. The only objects at Castledyke with zoomorphic designs were cruciform brooches, all other fasteners being either plain or with abstract dots or lines. It is interesting that none of the graves with animal deposits at Castledyke contained a cruciform brooch as well. This may be purely accidental, but it should be considered whether animal ornamentation could have fulfilled the same purpose as animal deposits.

The sheer volume and variety of animal bone from pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon burial sites makes any generic statements difficult. What can be said is that animal bone was a common grave good in cremation rites. The preferred species seem to have no correlation to the most common type of animal husbandry. Instead it may link to the status or even economic prowess of the people buried with them. The high percentage of sheep buried with women may correlate to their position in textile manufacture. Cattle and horse remains, which seem to have a masculine bias in cremation rites (possibly related to the fact that they are indicators of wealth), are rare with children, who have not yet acquired many possessions.

It seems that the amount of animal bone declines during the transition to inhumation burial, but there are local variations in the amount of animals deposited. While some of the later sites contain few animal bones, at other sites, such as Castledyke, which may have had direct connections to Continental customs via North Sea trading routes, animal bone becomes more popular as a grave good. It is also possible that in the earliest Anglo-Saxon period, when luxury grave goods, such as imported vessels, were few, the donation of a whole beast, let alone a few, accrued to the pinnacle of social status. In all the cemeteries examined, bones also seem to follow patterns, which may be identified as corresponding to a 'symbolic grammar'. The language that belongs to this grammar is still poorly understood, but it is clear that it has many accents, if not dialects, and makes use of a variety of register.

⁹⁶ A man between possibly two bears is depicted on the purse lid at Sutton Hoo and appears also on a seventh-century horse bridle decoration from Niederhone, Hesse, Germany; see H. Roth, *Kunst und Handwerk im frühen Mittelalter: Archäologische Zeugnisse von Childerich I bis zu Karl dem Großen* (Stuttgart: Theiss, 1986), pl. 41.

Pots, Buckets and Cauldrons: the Inventory of Feasting

CONTAINERS such as buckets, pots and occasionally glass vessels have been found in many Anglo-Saxon graves. Vessels may have been added to cremation pyres as well, with a minimum of 93 cremations from Spong Hill containing refired Saxon potsherds, as well as some glass vessels.¹ Such objects must have had, at least at some stage, a connection with food and drink, even if their meaning may have become more diffuse by the time they became part of the Anglo-Saxon burial rite. Pottery and containers made from other materials are generally counted in different categories and are examined under separate headings. Precious vessels, which were made from glass, animal horn, silver or copper alloy, and in some cases of wood with a gold or bronze trim, often occur with high-status burials. They habitually feature in certain sorts of grave: Arnold has observed that rich male graves in sixth-century Southern England always included weapons and some form of container.² One of the most well known is the ship burial under mound 1 at Sutton Hoo, which contained twenty-eight different vessels, among which were a Byzantine silver dish (the so-called Anastasius dish), a silver bowl with fluted handles, ten smaller silver vessels, a ladle with a parcel-gilt bowl, a small plain bowl without a handle, a Coptic bronze bowl, silver-mounted wooden vessels, three cauldrons, a hanging bowl and iron-bound bucket, plus pottery vessels (Plate 7). The ship funeral under mound 2 also contained an emphatic range of vessels, including a tub, a bucket, a copper-alloy bowl and a silver mounted cup. Sutton Hoo is a very high-status site, and all of these vessels are indicative of feasting and hospitality.³ Mounds 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 contained cremations wrapped in cloth that were then placed in bronze bowls. The disturbed ship burial under mound 2 contained drinking horns, an iron-bound bucket, a bronze bowl, a blue glass jar, a cauldron and a silver-mounted cup. The cremation of a man under mound 17 contained a cauldron, a haversack with meat bones, an iron-bound bucket and a drinking bowl.⁴ In the early seventh-century princely burial at Taplow, Buckinghamshire, a man was laid out in an oak-lined chamber under a mound. This burial contained no fewer

¹ McKinley, *Spong Hill, Part VIII*, 91.

² C.J. Arnold, 'Territories and leadership: framework for the study of emergent polities in early Anglo-Saxon southern England', in: S. Driscoll and M. Neeke eds., *Power and Politics in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 111–27, at 115.

³ Martin Carver and Christopher Fern, 'The seventh-century burial rites and their sequence', in: Carver ed., *Sutton Hoo princely burial*, 282–313, at 289.

⁴ Carver, *Sutton Hoo princely burial*, 11.

than nineteen vessels.⁵ The list has recently been extended when the seventh-century chamber burial from Prittlewell was discovered, with cauldrons, tubs, glass jars, drinking horns and an imported copper-alloy flagon, as well as a Coptic bowl.

The prestige of some precious vessels found in burials is enhanced by the fact that they were imported. Glassware from the Rhineland, such as the so-called claw beakers, has been found in high-status burials, as well as silver or bronze dishes from Byzantium. The type of vessel deposited in graves varies throughout Anglo-Saxon areas, but drinking vessels are in general placed with high-ranking individuals, whereas pots were given to all kinds of people. Seventh-century high-status inhumations, especially, often include feasting gear, such as glass vessels, goblets and cauldrons. In some cases prestigious vessels have been used as funerary vessels, such as at mound 6 and 7 at Sutton Hoo.

Pottery vessels served two functions, as cremation urns, but also as utility vessels, such as cooking pots or storage jars. They are studied by petrologists, but have been largely ignored in discussions of status. Archaeologists, as well as other scholars, have not been untouched by ideas of gender in their own time. Cooking has traditionally been regarded as a 'female' occupation and therefore less prestigious than 'feasting', which is related to the activities of the male war-band. We have to be careful not to attribute our own expectations to artefacts. Women may have been in charge of the larder and organise the food supply of the household. In the burial 'kits' correspondences between high-status feasting and women is indicated through other objects, such as strainers – which may have served to sieve out residues from wine. These are found in female graves in Southern England, and may have been influenced by Continental rites.

Pots do not just occur in female graves, but also with male burials, which would preclude their association with gendered activities. The importance of the 'humble pot' has been recognised; Catherine Hills for example, notes that pots were an important part of the burial rite in the inhumations at Spong Hill.⁶ Several graves that were not furnished with pots contained alternatives, in form of a bronze-bound bucket or wooden bowl. The inhumation cemetery at Spong Hill, is of course a site, which is surrounded by fifth- and sixth-century funerary vessels, and this may have influenced the importance of such objects here. It is, however, worth considering whether pots are not an essential part of early Anglo-Saxon funerary rites, and whether the purpose of their deposition changed over time. Some of the vessels at the mixed cemetery of Great Chesterford are undecorated pots,⁷ not unlike animal accessory vessels from cremation sites. A large part of the cemetery at Great Chesterford, which is situated near the Roman town and cemetery,⁸ had been destroyed through later commercial activities. Anglo-Saxon

⁵ Much of the grave was destroyed when it was excavated in 1883. Among the vessels were two decorated drinking horns, at least four silver mounted wooden vessels, four glass beakers and a large bronze dish; Capelle, *Archäologie*, 80–1.

⁶ Hills, *Spong Hill, Part III*, 7.

⁷ A 'mixed cemetery' contains cremations and inhumations.

⁸ Evison, *Great Chesterford*, 49.

graves are mixed with Roman debris, which complicate the affiliation of grave goods (particularly if they are found in the fill)⁹ and dating. Since Great Chesterford also contained cremation burials, the possibility remains that some of the vessels were not used to represent food containers. In other cases, such as G 13 (which contains the inhumation of a middle-aged female), the vessel includes the remains of animal bone. Grave 128, which was dated to the earliest period of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery in the fifth century, contains two vessels near the skull, one a pot, but also a glass cone beaker. This is an expensive vessel in an otherwise humbly furnished grave.

The deposition of vessels may mark a transition process, which sees a change from the deposition of food remains buried in a container to the interment of such objects on their own. The focal point of an Anglo-Saxon burial seems to be the display of the dead body,¹⁰ but the point when the mourners are drawn towards this focus is different in cremation and inhumation rites. The cremated body and accessories were displayed outside the grave prior to incineration, whereas it was possible to display the carefully laid out and arranged dead in their graves in inhumation rites. Decorated urns and associated objects may continue to underline the importance of the dead whose ashes are contained in them, but other wealth indicators are no longer visible. Changes in burial rite mean that such objects can now be presented around the body, and vessels may have served to do just that. For example, at the cemetery at Alton (Hampshire) the grave of a girl about ten years old (G 27) contained a copper-alloy-bound bucket, possibly made from yew, and inside it is the distal or mid-shaft of the right humerus of a sheep or goat. Two sheep or goat's teeth were found in the grave, one in the bucket and the other in the fill. The grave also contains a large number of goods, some of which are indicative of the status of a grown woman.

In most instances pots are no longer complete, which causes some problems. Anglo-Saxon cemeteries are often situated over earlier burial grounds. This may be a deliberate act of associating themselves with the people who had possessed the land before, or may have more practical reasons, since the decomposition of bodies has a considerable environmental impact on the surrounding areas; once such a place is established, it can be reused for such purposes, alleviating contamination. Prehistoric as well as Romano-British burial rites contain a number of food accessory vessels, and the residues of such sherds are often found within Anglo-Saxon graves and backfills. Without detailed analysis of the ceramics and description in the grave inventory it is not possible to distinguish between Anglo-Saxon depositions and residues from previous occupation. The sheer number of such sherds at some sites, and the fact that excavations (and subsequent reports) are often delivered on a shoe-string budget, is responsible for the fact that records often have to be kept to a minimum.

Animal bone deposits seem to have connotations with the position of the person buried with them, so it is worth asking whether it is possible to regard

⁹ See, for example, the large amount of Romano-British glass that was found on site; J. Price, 'The Roman glass', in: Evison ed., *Great Chesterford*, 87–9.

¹⁰ Geake, 'Control of burial practice', 260.

containers for food and drink as extensions of such statements, rather than as a different category of grave good. Nick Stoodley has argued that vessels, which may have contained food and drink associated with feasting, were a reflection of a part of some aspects of the deceased's life. He suggests that this category of grave goods has a male bias, with buckets having the strongest male association.¹¹ Bronze vessels and food offerings in the form of animal bone are more frequent with male inhumations, whereas pottery sherds are almost twice as likely to be found with female inhumations (the proportion of female to male burials with pottery sherds is 40: 23 percent).¹² Stoodley has shown that the frequency with which vessels are found differs between regions.¹³ His examination of 1,095 graves demonstrated that at Kentish sites pottery vessels were distributed almost equally between the sexes, but that the North-east sees most vessel deposits in male graves.¹⁴ Stoodley's examination, though, shows a high percentage of unsexed graves in some areas,¹⁵ which could tip the balance. Vessel fittings come mainly from wooden vessels, such as the maple dishes found at Sutton Hoo. They can either be a rim decoration or a copper-alloy fitting, and, while they are not uncommon, it is rare to see more than a handful at any Anglo-Saxon site. Wooden vessels (or the metal parts that usually remain) appear from the late sixth century onwards, and Helen Geake distinguishes between silver-rim mountings, which are exclusively male and occur predominantly in very rich graves, and copper-alloy fittings, which appear to be gender-neutral. They tend to be found in graves with above-average wealth indicators.¹⁶

There may be a number of reasons for such diverging patterns. First of all, gender connotations may differ between regions. Gender associations are always complex, and it is important not to make assumptions on the basis of what is expected from 'medieval women'. Women's roles and status may have differed in the various regions of Anglo-Saxon England and they may have had different objects to reflect such changes. Even at sites of relative proximity, there are variations in the burial kit. Ellen-Jane Pader, for example, has shown that the neighbouring sites of Holywell Row and Westgarth Gardens reveal a slight variation in the percentage of containers in female graves.¹⁷

Containers occur in many guises at Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and are used to house various objects. Wooden boxes often reveal an assortment of things: a spare brooch, a spindle-whorl or coins.¹⁸ Satchels, mainly found in male graves,

¹¹ Stoodley, *Spindle and Spear*, 33.

¹² Stoodley, *Spindle and Spear*, 33.

¹³ Stoodley, *Spindle and Spear*, 47.

¹⁴ Stoodley, *Spindle and Spear*, 47.

¹⁵ Almost 80 percent of pottery in the North-east is unsexed, and almost 100 percent of vessel fittings could not be gender-associated in the East Midlands; 47, tables 36 and 37. Figures of gender association fluctuate widely: for example, buckets are predominantly female in Kent and have a similar distribution in the West Midlands, but occur in fewer than 5 percent of female burials elsewhere. Buckets, as Helen Geake has observed for Conversion-period cemeteries, seem to occur in graves with strong gender identity; *Grave Goods in Conversion-Period England*.

¹⁶ Geake, *Grave Goods in Conversion-Period England*, 92.

¹⁷ Pader, *Symbolism*, 176 and fig 8.2.

¹⁸ As, for example, at Edix Hill G 18B.

have contained tools, such as the balances and weights, which were placed in a leather bag into G 67 at the Oxfordshire cemetery at Watchfield.¹⁹ Ivory bag rings may have been the Anglo-Saxon handbag equivalent and all kinds of things have been contained there. Lastly, 'work' or 'relic' boxes seem to have contain yarn, as well as herbs, and their purpose is not quite clear.²⁰ In the widest possible sense, these all held objects that were important to the dead person, either because of sentimental associations, or because they give us some indication who this person was, or how they were seen by those how buried them. In the case of spindle whorls and thread, this may point to their occupation. The variety of vessels contained in burials may reflect such social stratification. Martin Carver and Christopher Fern have recently classified the vessels used to house the cremated remains at Sutton Hoo into various categories, from 'very high' (silver dish), high' (copper-alloy vessel) to 'low' (pottery vessels).²¹ The low value attached to pottery is not only related to its material, but also to the assumption that it was readily obtainable. Glass vessels, which are at the top end of the scale, had to be imported, which presumably made them rare and expensive. To put such an expensive object into the grave will have been a substantial investment in the dead. Pottery, on the other hand, was produced on a large scale in various forms. Pottery of the earliest Anglo-Saxon period was often quite simple and seems to have been made locally. From the seventh century onwards the same material and design (die) occur over a much larger area, which leads to the assumption that pottery was traded and possibly made by specialist craftspeople.²²

Luxury goods, such as imported drinking vessels, need to be obtained via trade, which may have been controlled by leading elites.²³ The question of whether lower classes of society, such as peasants and the unfree, could obtain such goods may not only depend on money, but also on access to exchanges. Prior to the emergence of trading places, such as *wics* and *emporio* in the eighth century, which saw a concentration of craftspeople and trade in one place, was there a place where such objects could be bought, or were they tailor-made for an elite? Were they part of a gift-exchange between equals, or was there a vertical dimension as well? It is interesting that some burials contain only one drinking vessel, but very few have a set.²⁴ Perhaps the quantity of vessels signifies relative wealth, alternatively the deposition of only one drinking vessel might suggest that the person buried here was a retainer, who would be feasted, rather than a lord, who could feast others.

¹⁹ C. Scull ed., 'Excavation and survey at Watchfield, Oxfordshire', *Archaeology Journal* 149 (1992), 124–281.

²⁰ Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*, 184–9.

²¹ Carver and Fern, 'Seventh-century burial rites', 284.

²² Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 807. Wickham refers to the so-called 'Sancton– Baston group', named after two Lincolnshire cemeteries, where the same pottery was found over a distance of 160 km apart.

²³ Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 809.

²⁴ The Prittlewell 'prince' seems to have two of each: drinking horn, glass vessel and wooden drinking vessel. This may be a red herring, though, since he also seems to have two gold crosses and two Merovingian coins.

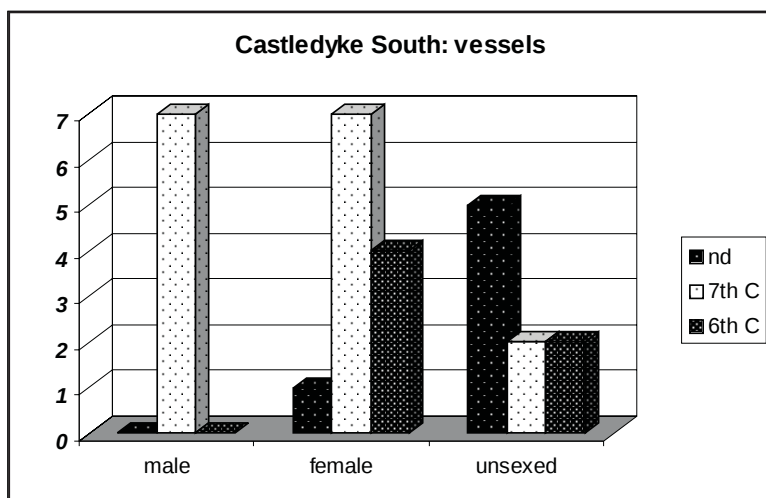


Fig. 3 Distribution of vessels according to sex, Castledyke South

During the sixth century vessels in female graves at Castledyke South outnumber those in male burials, but by the seventh century numbers are equal (see Fig. 3). However, the number of pottery sherds found in women's burials is much higher (Fig. 6 below). Burials at Butler's Field contained different vessel options in the sixth and in the seventh century. Buckets, for example, were mainly given to seventh-century adult males, apart from one sixth-century example that was buried with a child (G 11).²⁵ Copper-alloy bowls ceased to be buried with seventh-century inhumations. G 11 may have been at the cusp of this development, since this burial also contained both a bucket and a copper-alloy bowl with animal bone. Changes of burial 'fashions' occur continuously at Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, which allows a dating of objects.

At Butler's Field multiple vessels and animal bone seem to be the preserve of the young. Burial 92, the sixth-century inhumation of a young male, for example, contained a large Gotland cauldron, a hanging bowl with a wooden bowl inside. Sheep bone was found in the fill of this burial. The very large grave in which the coffin has been placed, together with two spears and a shield, which appear to have silver-plated components, marks out this burial as special. It is located in a spacious area towards the south of the main burial area, and adjacent to the inhumation of a four-year-old child from the same period, who is buried with a gilded copper-alloy keystone garnet brooch. This is an expensive grave good for any member of society, let alone a little girl. The girl was buried with animal bone and a potsherd in the fill of her grave. The burial of the young man could identify him as belonging to a leading family, who provide for a number of dependants. The girl's inhumation may signify that she, too, was important enough to have a feast in her honour, at least at the time of her burial.

²⁵ The burial could not be sexed, but goods such as saucer brooches suggest that the gender association is female.

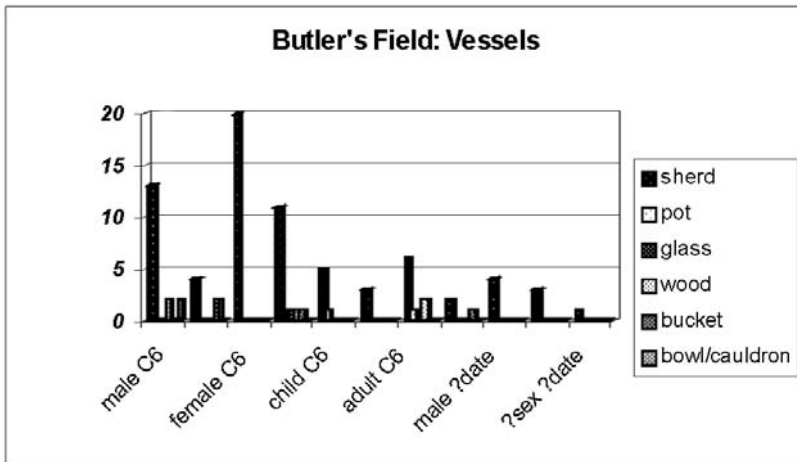


Fig. 4 Vessel distribution, Butler's Field

Large functional vessels, such as buckets or massive cauldrons, could have been used for cooking or distributing drinks. The deposition of large tubs and vats precedes the Anglo-Saxon period and was widespread in burials in Celtic areas. Bettina Arnold writes that every undisturbed high-status grave found on the Continent from the late Hallstatt to the La Tène period (around 600–400 BC) contains feasting and drinking equipment.²⁶ Many of these Celtic burials have cauldrons or tubs, which could hold either mead or food. In Britain, one of the earliest examples of mead comes from a Bronze Age burial at Ashgrove (Fife), which has been dated to 1000 BC.²⁷

It has been argued that at Castledyke functional vessels, such as pots, reflect a low status, in view of a large proportion of them occurring with children's and juvenile inhumations.²⁸ This has been corroborated from other sites, such as Apple Down (Sussex), where two hand-made storage jars were interred with children's burials.²⁹ One globular pot was found with the burial of a toddler at Butler's Field (G 13), and another with G 63, the inhumation of a juvenile, but pottery sherds appear in all kinds of inhumations. It seems that other vessel types are more likely to occur with inhumations of the under-twenty-year-olds. Exceptions are two seventh-century burials with buckets. One of them is G 40, an inhumation of a middle-aged male with a large array of weapons; the other is G 172/1, which was the double inhumation of a middle-aged man and a small child. Both graves contain a more than average display of grave goods. There may be several motivations behind investing people who have just reached sexual

²⁶ B. Arnold, 'Power drinking in Iron Age Europe', *British Archaeology* 57 (2001), 12–19, at 14.

²⁷ E. Koch, 'Mead, chiefs and feasts in later prehistoric Europe', in: M. Parker-Pearson ed., *Food, Culture and Identity in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age*, BAR International Series 1117 (Oxford, 2003), 125–43, at 126.

²⁸ J. Brennan, 'Social structure', 344.

²⁹ G 76 and G 89; A. Down and M. Welch eds., *Chichester Excavations VII: Apple Down and The Mardens* (Chichester: Chichester District Council, 1990), 106.

maturity with such vessels. It may reflect the fact that they have just attained a position as adult members of the society,³⁰ as heads of a family group. As such, they will have had their own homestead, with the ability to produce a surplus.

Sometimes vessels are no longer complete, either because of decay or because they were already defunct at the time of burial. The elaborate funerary display of G 14 from Butler's Field, the seventh-century inhumation of a teenage girl, contained a number of textile tools, silver pins, keys, a box and what appears to be a thread box, shears and a cowrie shell. A fragment of a glass claw beaker and potsherds were found in the fill. In the bountiful assemblage from this grave the broken glass looks quite odd, unless, of course, the fact that it is broken is not relevant.

It is possible that parts of the vessel could be sufficient to symbolise the whole. For example, the excavators of Great Chesterford have noted a large sherd in front of the chest of a young man (G 93, undated), which could have been 'used as a dish'.³¹ The body of the man was laid out on his side, which is not uncommon, but his legs were angled as if he was sitting on an invisible chair with his hands outstretched towards the sherd, the only grave good. Burial position may be subject to the size of the grave, movement or preference of local customs, but this is an intriguing arrangement.

The deposition of pottery sherds at Snape appears to be more deliberate than accidental,³² and an intriguing use of pottery sherds has been observed at this site, where pieces of the same vessel were found in more than one grave. G 6 (a male inhumation), for example, contained a nearly complete vessel, apart from one missing piece, which was found some twenty metres away with the shattered cremation urn of G 90, which contained the remains of an infant or juvenile.³³ This poses two questions: first, whether the vessel was broken on purpose and what kind of idea was expressed through it, and secondly the connection between the two burials. The inclusion of the same vessel in the two burials, which may have been a parent and child, could suggest that vessels play a part in the funerary ritual, and that once they have been used for this purpose their remains are made 'defunct' in order to symbolise the break in the relationship between the living and dead. It also seems to indicate a relationship between the adult and the child. The older person, who was buried with the larger share, may have been the person who cared for the younger in life. A 'ritual' breaking of a funerary dish has been observed with the sixth-century copper-alloy hanging bowl from Hough-on-the-Hill (Lincolnshire), which was deliberately pierced prior to being placed in the grave (Plate 3). The bowl was buried with a sword, which was also broken, contained parts of cremated bone (over 2,500 pieces), a fused glass palm cup and copper-alloy remains from a bucket. In her evaluation of funerary rites in

³⁰ Sally Crawford has shown that children had their own burial 'kit', where certain goods only occur with certain ages. She has also defined the adult threshold on the basis of grave goods and later text sources; *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England*, esp. 27–32 and 40–6.

³¹ Evison, *Great Chesterford*, 104.

³² Filmer-Sankey, 'Pottery scatters', in: W. Filmer-Sankey and T. Pestell eds., *Snape*, 244–6, at 245.

³³ Filmer-Sankey, 'Pottery scatters', 244–6.

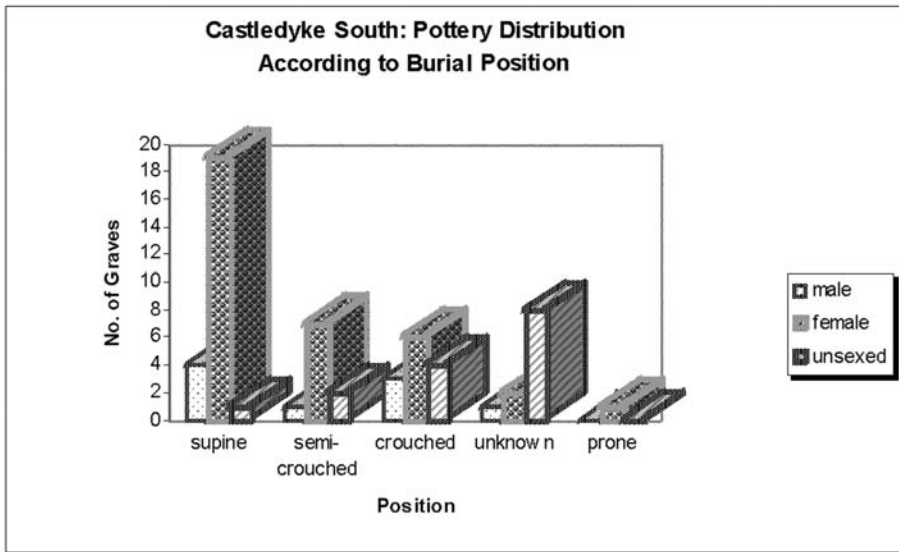


Fig. 5 Correlation between burial position and pottery inclusion in inhumation graves, at Castledyke South

Merovingian France, Bonnie Effros has suggested that there may have been some form of ‘purification’ ritual that was performed prior to interment, which saw parts of the funerary display (including charcoal, bone and ceramic sherds) being placed into the backfill of the buria, l.³⁴

Many pottery sherds found in the graves at Castledyke were not of Anglo-Saxon, but Romano-British provenance; indeed, the distribution between the two types of sherds is almost equal. In many cases such remains have been interpreted as residues from previous occupation still visible in the soil. Castledyke is situated over a Bronze Age barrow, but no Roman grave field was found at the site, which could explain the intrusion of such sherds, indicating that they were taken to the site on purpose. Roman objects occur frequently in Anglo-Saxon graves,³⁵ and pot sherds may have been chosen deliberately for their provenance from Roman vessels. At Castledyke burial with Romano-British sherds seems to correspond to a particular form of body layout: many of them occur with crouched inhumations. Crouching at Castledyke is not a result of graves that were cut too small. Bodies are sometimes hunched to one side of the grave, which could suggest that they were dumped into the grave, or that the body was placed into a shroud and dropped into the grave.³⁶ In general, however, the more grave goods were deposited with the body at Castledyke, the more ‘straight’ the person was laid out.

³⁴ *Creating a Community*, 89.

³⁵ R. White, ‘Scrap or substitute: Roman material in Anglo-Saxon graves’, in E. Southwold ed., *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries: a reappraisal* (Stroud: Sutton, 1993), 125–52.

³⁶ Generally great care is taken in the laying out of the body, which implies that the body was supposed to be seen by the mourners.

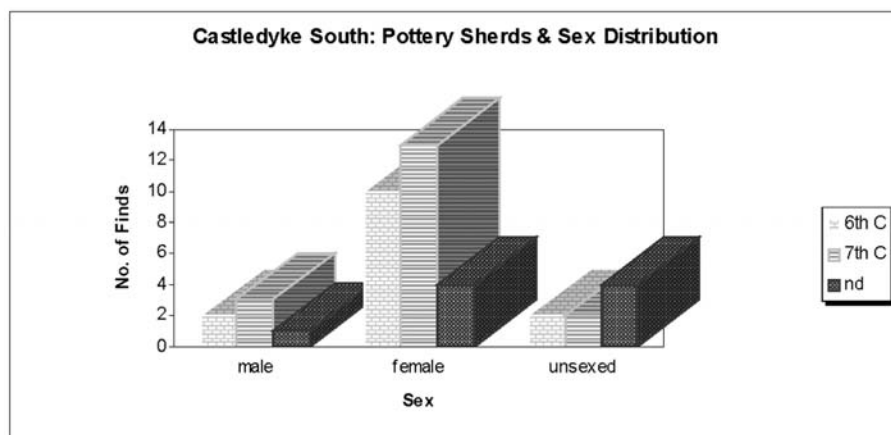


Fig. 6 Correlation between gender and pottery in inhumation graves, Castledyke South

The Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Worthy Park (Hampshire) has revealed a paltry array of animal bone and also few vessels (nine graves).³⁷ The site is a mixed cemetery, but could not be excavated in full, and there may be more graves towards the western boundary. To date 150 burials have been excavated. Vessels are nearly all positioned near the skull, usually at the right side of the head. An exception is G 49, the burial of an elderly male who may have died from an infection, which contains a bucket, as well as an iron seax. The bucket as well as the weapon mark him out as a leading member of this community. Since every leading male grave is supposed to have a female equivalent, the corresponding female burial may be G 9, an inhumation of a middle-aged woman, which is situated among a cluster of burials that are all in west–east orientation. The stratigraphy and dating at Worthy Park are not clear,³⁸ but the site contains clusters of burials. Burial activity seems to have ceased in the middle of the seventh century. There is a high proportion of people with illness towards the south-east corner, some of which may not have been obvious to their contemporaries, but others, such as the person with possible Paget’s Disease in G 11, would have been visible. None of the burials of people with illness contains a vessel, and they are, apart from G 49, poorly furnished. The range of degenerative diseases present indicates a life of hard physical labour.

One vessel type interred with the dead at Worthy Park was wooden copper-alloy bound vessels. In all but two cases bowls were found with female inhumations, but elderly women were buried with handmade pots rather than wooden vessels. The evidence from Worthy Park suggests that vessels were given to women who, judging from their grave goods, were reasonably well off. It is feasible that these women would have been in charge of a household, as indicated

³⁷ Hawkes and Grainger, *Worthy Park*.

³⁸ The site was published posthumously from the notes of Sonia Hawkes in 2003; the excavation took place in 1961–2.

in other grave goods, such as latchlifters. The vessels may underline the position of women who were responsible for the provision of the household.

Edix Hill, like many other sites, is not fully excavated, so that any observations must be tentative. This unique cemetery contained two bed burials, which are very rare³⁹ and indicate that this site is likely to have been used as the burial place of an elite. While most skeletal remains from this site are men and women in their prime, there are also indications of hard physical labour and disease in some of the population. Out of the 115 graves, eighteen are multiple inhumations, of which fourteen are contemporary. Six out of these eighteen graves contain vessels. The site was in use over a period of 150 years in the sixth and seventh centuries, and the number of datable graves with vessels is nearly the same in both periods of burial. The arrangement of vessel deposits across the cemetery seems to follow an internal choreography. A line of vessels almost follows trench 1, of which four are most remarkable: G 4 and G 9, dated to the sixth century and G 2 and G 18 dated to the seventh century (see Plate 4). G 4, an inhumation of an adult male, was heavily disturbed by ploughing. The grave contained the remains of a glass vessel and seems to have had some form of stone deposit or lining. G 9 was the inhumation of a mature male and another body (the grave may have been reused for this burial). A copper-alloy mount from a vessel made with willow was found at the waist. The seventh-century burials were both multiple inhumations: G 2 contained at least three bodies, who were male adults, and a copper-alloy vessel mount was found at the left shoulder of a young male in the earliest burial. Edix Hill has been examined for possible DNA traces (which turned out to be negative) and hereditary traits, which are common among family members.⁴⁰ No similarities could be discovered among these individuals. This does not preclude that they were not related in some way, but the relationship is not obvious. G 18 contained the burial of a young leprous woman who was laid out with a bucket at her ankles, which contained sheep bone. This grave, too, was a multiple inhumation. Only two further copper-alloy mounts were found at Edix Hill, one at the western fringe of burials in a row of graves deposited in an Iron Age ditch, dated to the sixth century (G 66), and one on the eastern side (G 75, no date), which seems to have been robbed at some stage. This burial appears to be aligned with another burial in the east part, which is at the north end (G 88, dated to the sixth century), and which contained a miniature bucket. The burials follow an exact line and seem to be laid out at right angles.⁴¹ Towards the south of the line of burials with copper/glass vessels and buckets is G 13 (date unknown), the

³⁹ Only six bed burials have been found so far. Most of them are female inhumations, who are placed on a bed, which is then lowered into the grave. They may be in the same category as chamber graves and ship burials. The use of carpets, 'duvets', pillows and other material that may be linked to resting has been observed from Anglo-Saxon burials, as well as the 'pillowing' of the head on stones.

⁴⁰ Malim and Hines, 'Genetic relationships', in: Malim and Hines, *Edix Hill*, 308–11. Family members share common traits, such as the shape of the face, or the way in which the bones of the skull have fused. In the absence of DNA analysis these traits can be studied to examine family relationships.

⁴¹ Even if we consider that the excavation with the H-shaped trenches over what appears to be the middle of the cemetery may enhance the perception of symmetry, these graves seemed to be carefully planned across the burial site.

inhumation of an infant with a ceramic pot at the feet, and which is overlain by an adult female in what appears to be a contemporary sixth-century burial. This is one of the southernmost graves so far excavated and seems to be at the boundary in the cemetery outlay. To the left of G 4 is another burial with a vessel (G 5), the sixth-century inhumation of a woman in her twenties who was buried with a rim sherd at the right hand which overlies the burial of two children. Unfortunately, the poor preservation of G 4 does not allow a comparison of the arrangement in these two inhumations. The significance of these burials across the site cannot be fully assessed, since some of the contextual information was disturbed through ploughing/robbing. It is not clear why burials with vessels are distributed so widely across the site. A clustering of burials has been observed by the excavators,⁴² but whether all of these people came from the same 'class' is debatable. The relative rareness of vessels, whether made from precious metal or ceramics at sites such as Edix Hill suggests that there is some form of connection. Archaeologists have argued that Anglo-Saxon cemeteries contain focal graves, and the spreading of vessels at Edix Hill may suggest that these graves function as foci. The very divergence in sex, layout and wealth, however, makes it difficult to detect a common thread. Graves 18 and 66 have both been identified as containing people with infectious disease (leprosy and tuberculosis), whereas the man from G 9 had been stabbed in the back, though the injury does not seem to have been severe enough to puncture the lungs.⁴³ This, however, does not explain why others with similar impairments were not buried with vessels.

At West Heslerton most ceramic deposits seem to occur in the northern part of the site between the two prehistoric features and the north side of the A64 road. None of them seem to come from the earliest phase of the cemetery. One of the most outstanding finds is G 77, which contained the body of an adult with fragments of a glass cone beaker at the head and three vessels found high in the grave propped up against the west end of the grave. The excavators assumed that the vessels may be grave markers,⁴⁴ but they still appear to have been covered by topsoil. The burial, which is located to the west of the prehistoric timber structure, is in a cluster of burials with pottery vessels. Immediately to the left is an unsexed individual who seems to have been buried with an animal accessory vessel over the abdomen that showed soot stains on the outside. To the north of this burial is that of an adult woman in G 95, cut into the Neolithic ditch. She was laid in a coffin and the pottery vessel was placed on top. The bodies are all west-east orientated, but they seem to have been laid out differently in the grave. What is common to all of them is the position of a cooking vessel over their bodies. A similar symmetry can be observed with Graves 107 and 108, which were adjacent within the prehistoric henge. Both graves seem to come from the last phase at the cemetery and both contain a copper-alloy vessel repair. G 107 is the burial of a woman in her twenties, while the other grave is that of a young child with a range of female

⁴² Malim and Hines, *Edix Hill*, 311–17.

⁴³ C. Duhig, 'The human skeletal remains', in: Malim and Hines, *Edix Hill*, 184. The woman in G 5 also had bone changes which indicate infection, such as possible meningitis; idem 177–9.

⁴⁴ Houghton and Powlesland eds., *West Heslerton*, 1, 119.

grave goods. The burial position and the choice of grave goods may indicate a relationship, either as members of the same family, or even as belonging to the same social group. In any case, these are special at a site that otherwise seems to have fewer vessels. Only three others were detected, and one of them comes from a most unusual burial of a young woman (G 132) who was buried prone with her legs firmly bent back to the spine. This position can only be achieved through binding or pinning back of the legs.⁴⁵ The sixth-century grave in the densely packed part of the cemetery just below the A64 revealed a full array of grave goods, including latchlifters, brooches, pendants and a walnut amulet. The grave also contained brassica seeds. There is no clear pathology that could indicate why this woman was bound, as even the most debilitating paralysis of the legs would not allow for the legs to be pinned back to the spine. The reason may be that this is an extremely small grave and the body just fits the space. Perhaps this grave was slotted into the space, since this part of the cemetery is already very crowded. The grave is in the vicinity of G 141, the fourth inhumation with a copper-alloy vessel repair, dated to the same period as 132. Bones are much decayed, but here, too, the legs were folded back, though the body is laid out supine.

The deposition of vessels at the various sites seems to follow a choreography, but it is interesting that this is negotiated individually at each site. The twenty-eight pots found at Great Chesterford were all placed at the head, apart from G 69, where the pot is supposed to have been placed at the foot end of the grave.⁴⁶ At the Hampshire cemetery of Snell's Corner, all vessels found with female inhumations were deposited on the right side of the body. Male inhumations had their deposits of food or vessels either on the left, such as the animal bone in G 14, or in the fill.⁴⁷ There was no clear overall preference for the deposition of vessels with the adult female inhumations at Castledyke, but there seemed to be a careful consideration of individual types: copper-alloy vessel strips were found on the left side of the body,⁴⁸ whereas pottery and vessels were preferred on the right: a Frankish jug was found at the pelvis of G 1, in G 46 the deep blue glass vessel fragment was also placed to the right of the neck, and the remains from a drinking horn with the elderly woman in G 124 were found by the right humerus. In G 17, a double inhumation of two females, one had Romano-British pottery in the fill near the right foot and the other had a copper alloy vessel repair at the right femur. There was a preference for placing animal bone and pottery vessels near the head or feet at Castledyke, but other containers appear to have been deposited on either side, usually near the hip area. The absence of a uniform choreography makes such observations difficult to evaluate, but all of them underline that the position of artefacts in Anglo-Saxon graves is not accidental. Nine graves at Oakington

⁴⁵ Haughton and Powlesland eds., *West Heslerton*, 1, 92.

⁴⁶ Evison, *Great Chesterford*, 21. The grave was that of a child, but the bone material has almost completely decayed.

⁴⁷ G.M. Knocker, 'Early burials and an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Snell's Corner near Horndean, Hampshire', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society* 19 (1956), 117–70; see, for example, Graves 4 and 15.

⁴⁸ Graves 18, 35, 53 and 147.

(Cambridgeshire) contained pottery sherds that were obviously deliberately placed on the shoulder or pelvis of the deceased person.⁴⁹

The more mundane containers found at cemeteries can reveal aspects of relationships within Anglo-Saxon society. At Castledyke, a mammiform vessel was found in what is assumed to have been an infant's grave (G 133, sadly, no bone was preserved). Such a vessel would be suitable for bottle-feeding an infant who could not take the breast.⁵⁰ The vessel clearly represents care that the mourners want to extend to a dead child. At the same site various nearly complete pots were discovered in other sub-adult graves. They were usually placed at the head end of the grave and some of them even show traces of sooting. The burial of children with complete pots occurs fairly frequently. The sixth-century cemetery at Holywell Row, Suffolk, contained the inhumation of a girl, who had a pot with several duck's eggs placed in front of her face.⁵¹ At Oakington, four children's graves contained the remains of small accessory pots.⁵² It may be possible that parents felt the need to symbolically 'feed' their child after death, or symbolise the affection they felt for them.

Whether the Anglo-Saxons copied the use of vessels in funerary rites, or whether these are based on indigenous rituals, remains unclear. What we can observe is that prestige vessels, such as hanging bowls, occur mainly in inhumation burials.⁵³ For example, the Anglo-Saxon burial at Sutton Hoo contained a Celtic hanging bowl as well as cauldrons.⁵⁴ The escutcheons on the bowls are most certainly of Celtic provenance.⁵⁵ They are supposed to have been made in one of the Celtic regions in mainland Britain, most likely in the kingdom of Elmet, which had survived until the early seventh century.⁵⁶ The manufacture of hanging bowls in Britain has been dated to the fourth to eighth centuries. Their function as food containers is indicated in an example found in a secondary barrow inhumation at Gally Hills/Barnstead Down (Surrey), which contained crab-apples.⁵⁷ Pots could be symbolically replaced by potsherds, and it is feasible that the deposition of hanging bowls could also be represented through parts of a vessels. At Benty Grange (Derbyshire) only the escutcheons from three hanging bowls were found in a secondary inhumation in a barrow. The burial also contained a silver-mounted leather drinking horn.⁵⁸ Hanging bowls were costly items, and it may seem quite natural that the Anglo-Saxons, who often deposited

⁴⁹ Taylor *et al.*, 'Oakington', 57.

⁵⁰ Drinkall and Foreman, *Castledyke South*, 309–10.

⁵¹ T.C. Lethbridge, *Recent Excavations in Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes for the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, 1931), 33–4. Lethbridge assumes that this is a very early inhumation, no later than AD 500.

⁵² Taylor *et al.*, 'Oakington', 66.

⁵³ H. Geake, 'When were hanging bowls deposited in Anglo-Saxon graves?', *Med Arch* 43 (1999), 1–18.

⁵⁴ Hines, *The Scandinavian Character*, esp. 288ff. Hines rejects the idea that Sutton Hoo was the burial place for a royal house of Swedish origins, but underlines the role of craftsmen in the shaping of styles.

⁵⁵ R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, Vol. 3: *Silver, Textiles* (London: British Museum Publications, 1983), 202–95.

⁵⁶ Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, 3: 1, 295.

⁵⁷ J.F. Barfoot and D. Price-Williams, 'The Saxon barrow at Gally Hills, Barnstead Down', *Research Volume of the Surrey Archaeological Society* 3 (1976), 59–76, at 67 and pl. VII.

⁵⁸ David R. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (London: Routledge, 1992), 92.

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old or broken artefacts with their dead (sometimes skilfully arranged on the body), should be loath to place such an expensive item in the earth. It is also possible that objects may have been deliberately broken in a funerary ceremony and that only parts of the vessel were interred with the dead. The other part, as suggested in the broken pot from Snape, may have been buried with other members of the same group, who may have belonged to the same household. In any case, the evidence draws attention to the fact that replacements may have been understood to be representations of containers and vessels.

Last Orders?

AMPLE evidence for food deposits, cooking gear and even possible hearths is found in early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. Vessels and bones may represent symbolic aspects of the deceased person's status, which was part of the mortuary display, but in some cases these are not found on the body, but in the backfill of the grave. These may be the remains of feasting, which took place either prior to the funeral, or even in the graveyard itself. Feasting may have been part of a transition ritual, in which the dead provided for the living (by bequeathing them succession and status) and the living took leave of the dead by assuming their new role in the group or family. How often such feasting took place is unclear, since only sporadic indications are found from cemeteries. It is possible that this was a regular part of Anglo-Saxon funeral rites, and it is even conceivable that some form of posthumous commemorative rite was practised as well.

However, our clearest indication for food in rituals of the pagan Anglo-Saxons is not related to funerary feasting. In his work on the reckoning of time *De Temporibus Annis*, Bede compares the Roman months to the native calendar. November, he explains, is *blodmonað*, 'blood month', in English since 'Blodmonath mensis immolationum quod in eo pecora quae occisuri erant diis suis voverent. Gratias tibi, bone Iesu, qui nos ab his vanis avertens tibi sacrificia laudis offerre donasti.'¹ How these sacrifices have been celebrated before is left to the imagination. At another point Bede indicates that animal sacrifices were a habitual part of feasting, but gives no more information on the occasion or purpose of such events.² His information is included in a letter by Pope Gregory II with advice for Bishop Mellitus. The pope advises that it is better to allow some rituals if they are done in the name of Christ than to alienate the newly converted population:

Et quia boues solent in sacrificio daemonum multos occidere, debet eis etiam hac de re aliqua sollemnitas inmutari: ut die dedicationis uel natalicii sanctorum martyrum, quorum illic reliquiae ponuntur, [...] et religiosi conuiuiis sollemnitatem celebrent, nec diabolo iam animalia immolent, et ad laudem Dei in esu suo animalia occidant et

¹ Ed. C. Jones, *Beda: Opera de Temporibus* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1943), 213: Blodmonath is 'month of immolations', 'for then the cattle which were to be slaughtered were consecrated to their gods. Good Jesu, thanks be to thee, who has turned us away from these vanities and given us [grace] to offer to thee the sacrifice of praise,' trans. F. Wallis, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 54.

² Julia Barrow has suggested that this passage refers to the *blodmonað* sacrifices, which were to be turned into a feast in honour of St Martin, in mid-November, pers comm. St Brice's Day conference (Nottingham, November 2002).

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donatori omnium de satietate sua gratias referant, ut dum eis aliqua exterius gaudia reseruantur, ad interiora gaudia consentire facilius ualeant.³

Other evidence for the fact that animals may have played an important role in pre-Christian feasts comes from the pagan temple at Yeavering, where ox-heads were found in a pit dug against the inside of the east wall.⁴ Cattle bones have dominated at Yeavering, and almost 97 percent of the recovered bone comes from cattle.⁵ This may indicate a local preference for this species, but Yeavering is unquestionably a high-status site, and the cattle may have been part of the surplus gathered through taxation. Yeavering functioned as a meeting place for the king's circuit. The dead, however, were not very far away from the place of feasting, since a small number of graves were found in the vicinity of the temple, which was later enclosed by a larger structure that may have had a Christian purpose.⁶

Very little is known about pagan Anglo-Saxon funeral rites. While we can observe the dead in their graves, and even guess from insect infestation how long the body was exposed before interment, there is little information on what happened in the time between death and burial. In the hope of forming a better understanding of what happened after death, it is not surprising that some scholars revert to the description of a funeral by the tenth-century Arab envoy Ibn Fadlan,⁷ who met with the *Rus* on his travels around the Volga. In analogy with other contemporaneous sources that identify the *Rus* as Scandinavians, the people that he encounters are supposed to be a band of Vikings. In his travel report Ibn Fadlan recounts, among other things, the funeral of an important member of the group, which includes not only sex and alcohol, but also a gruesome depiction of the slaughter of various animals and a female slave to accompany the body on the pyre. While this narrative is certainly entertaining, it should be considered whom exactly Fadlan met out there in the wilds of Russia. Were these people regular Scandinavian traders or some renegade group? How good was his translator and how much did Fadlan understand of the rites he allegedly witnessed (let alone how much had to be added for his target audience at home)? And is it acceptable to expect that there was a comparable Germanic funerary culture that stretched from the depth of Russia to the west of England over a period of six hundred years?

The key to understanding funerary rites may indeed come via a roundabout way, but one that looks closely at ways in which funerary rites were affected by

³ 'And because they are in the habit of slaughtering many cattle as sacrifices to devils, some solemnity ought to be given to them in exchange for this. So on the day of the dedication or the festivals of the body of martyrs, whose relics are deposited there, [...] let them celebrate the solemnity with religious feasts. Do not let them sacrifice animals to the devil, but let them slaughter animals for their own food to the praise of God, and let them give thanks to the Giver of all things for His bountiful provision. Thus while some outward rejoicings are preserved, they will be able more easily to share inward rejoicings'; trans. Colgrave and Mynors, *HE*, I, chap. 30, 106–8.

⁴ B. Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering: an Anglo-Saxon Centre of Early Northumbria* (London: HMSO, 1977), 53; Owen, *Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons*, 44–8. She also points out that there is some place-name evidence that suggests animal sacrifice.

⁵ Mulville and Ayres, 'Animal bone', 349.

⁶ Arnold, *Archaeology*, 150.

⁷ A. Zeki Validi Togan ed. and trans., *Ibn Fadlan's Reisebericht* (Leipzig: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 1939).

the conversion of other areas of Europe that had links with the Anglo-Saxon world. France is the closest neighbour to England and evidence from trade indicates that there was an extensive North Sea connection. Bonnie Effros has shown that there is abundant evidence for funerary feasting in Merovingian Gaul and other parts of fifth-century Europe, such as deposits of chicken, eggs and fowl found in two graves under St Severin in Cologne.⁸ Effros explains that in contrast to food placed into graves, the remains of such feasting in cemeteries are harder to document, since they are often paltry.⁹ That such meals must have existed is clear from the many rumblings about such occasions in written sources.¹⁰ Donald Bullough observes that 'sacrifices were unlawful for Christians, ritual meals and recurrent libations at or over the tombs of the dead were not, and there is ample archaeological evidence for their continuance in many parts of Southern Europe well into the sixth century and perhaps even to the time of Gregory the Great.'¹¹ It seems while this displeased some clerics, it was not before the eighth century that Frankish kings and clerics explicitly forbade such feasts.¹² Eating and drinking with the dead could have continued well into the period of Anglo-Saxon literacy, but, since English clerics, for various reasons, are far more subtle than their Continental counterparts, the possibility of such feasting has not been discussed.

Effros uses both text and material culture to underline her point. The material culture of pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon graves shows ample evidence for food residues, such as animal bone and the pots and dishes on which they can be served. The species chosen to accompany the dead appears to be status-related, which seems to contradict the idea that these may have been part of funerary feasting. In many cases, as shown, they are waste produce, and since the deposition of such an item still requires the animal to be killed, it should be asked what happens to the rest of the beast.

Evidence for feasting may be sought in the animal remains, vessels and potsherds tossed into the grave when it was closed. Excavators have noted that sometimes pots occur very high in the grave, but have not necessarily associated with this feasting.¹³ At the inhumation cemetery of Spong Hill vessels occasionally seem to occur above the body, but not at the top of the grave, which would preclude their use as 'grave markers'.¹⁴ The position of such objects could, of course indicate that they were placed on top of a coffin, but even then they are outside the body and not essentially part of the funerary attire surrounding the corpse in the grave. At Spong Hill at least 37 of the 57 inhumation graves

⁸ *Creating a Community*, 79–91, at 79.

⁹ *Creating a Community*, 80.

¹⁰ *Creating a Community*, 74–9.

¹¹ Bullough, 'Burial, community', 188; see also Effros, *Creating a Community*, 85.

¹² *Creating a Community*, 79.

¹³ Houghton and Powlesland eds., *West Heslerton*, I, 89.

¹⁴ Hills, Penn and Rickett eds., *Spong Hill, Part III*. Graves with vessels above the body were: 4, 8, 17, 23 and 56. The preponderance of inhumations with pots in the fill seems to be to the western side of the inhumation cemetery.

contained pottery, many of them sherds from the fill. In at least ten pots residues of organic material were detected.¹⁵

Highly perishable objects, such as animal bone, are quite useless as grave markers, since they decay and may also attract attention from other predators. These, however, also occur habitually in the backfill of graves, and in some cases, such as at Butler's Field, most of the bone and sherds were deposited when the grave was closed. However, not all cemeteries show wide-scale evidence for backfill remains. At Great Chesterford, most food and drink objects are interred with the body,¹⁶ whereas elsewhere such objects may occur in the fill or even on top of the grave. Such variation between sites may indicate regional or chronological diversity. In the same way that animal bone and vessels do not occur with every grave there could also have been a distinction of who was feasted and who was not. At the moment no coherent picture emerges of the basis on which such distinctions were made. There is a tendency that lesser-furnished inhumation graves are more likely to contain bones. If the correlation between grave goods, wealth and social position is accepted then these may be the poorer people of the community, but this is not always the case.

The richest grave at Sewerby, for example, which housed the inhumation of a young woman, contained sheep bone at her head.¹⁷ Small heaps of bone are also found outside this grave. Is it feasible to assume that such objects were tossed into the grave during some form of ceremony, which may have been a feast with the dead? While there is evidence for structures that suggest a ritual feast in the graveyard, the provision of the mourners may not have taken place at the graveside, but at the house of the dead. It is possible that such small or broken remains are a symbolic portion interred with the dead.¹⁸ At Alton, Hampshire, two silver rim fragments were found in Grave 16, the rich seventh-century burial of a middle-aged male.¹⁹ The rims had remnants of beech wood attached and were originally parts of drinking cups. One of the cups was found underneath a shield boss, which had been placed over the head, and the other was found approximately 10 cm from the floor of the grave. This could be interpreted that the first vessel was intended for the dead person and the second was used by those who attended the funeral, which was then thrown into the grave while it was backfilled. It is always possible that the position of the object has been moved by later activity. For example, a sixth-century female inhumation at Castledyke (G 136) contained a copper repair part from a wooden vessel in the fill. The only other find was a knife

¹⁵ Hills, Penn and Rickett eds., *Spong Hill, Part III*, 7.

¹⁶ Exemptions are: G 62, the inhumation of a sixth-century young woman, who is buried with roe deer and ox bones in the fill; G 80, an undated inhumation of a middle-aged male, with sheep/goat deposits in the fill; G 86, a young boy, with cattle bones in the fill, buried with a dog at the foot of the grave; G 122, the multiple inhumation of a young male, female infant and an elderly woman, which contained 'many split animal bones' in the fill. The grave also contained a claw beaker and globular pot.

¹⁷ Crabtree, 'Animal symbolism', 22; Hirst, *Sewerby*, 94.

¹⁸ Effros has suggested that this is the case at Merovingian cemeteries; *Creating a Community*, 89.

¹⁹ V. Evison ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Alton, Hampshire*, Hampshire Field Club Monograph 4 (Winchester: Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society, 1988), 75–6. The grave disturbed cremation 46, but artefacts are associated with this burial.

with the body. The grave was cut into by another burial, which contained the much-decayed remains of a second juvenile body. It is possible that the original position of the repair clip was disturbed when the grave was reused.

The rich, seventh-century inhumation of a man of uncertain age at Alton contained a bronze-bound bucket, which was found at the top end of the grave. The same grave also contained a cremation in a Roman cooking pot.²⁰ Pottery occasionally shows evidence for sooting, which may be residues from previous cooking activities. Why was this used object put in the grave? Is it because there was nothing else that could be afforded to the dead? The choice of a pot must have had some form of meaning to those who looked at the body in the grave. Cooking pots may have still contained associations with the food that was prepared in them. At the cemetery at Empingham two graves preserved charred remains in vessels, which have been interpreted as food offerings.²¹ One of the inhumations was a woman of childbearing age (G 48), where a pot was placed near her feet. The other was the burial of a child. Both of them were given other grave goods, but neither had with them any artefact that would place them in Alcock's 'alpha stratum' of society.²² It seems that at Empingham, as well, cooking pots were not put into high-status burials.

Charred bones and sooted pots may have been deposited as a symbolic marker of a last meal, but is there any evidence that some of the meals may have been prepared on site? A possible example of cooking activity from an Anglo-Saxon cemetery has come from the recent discovery of burnt stone features at the fifth- to seventh-century cemetery at Snape.²³ This site housed a number of mixed burials, and altogether seven of these burnt stone features have been found. Much of the evidence was destroyed by ploughing and stripping, so that at first they were supposed to have been remnants from modern tree clearing. Burnt stone features are usually associated with prehistoric contexts, but here they were identified as Anglo-Saxon by the carbon dating of wood remains. This indicates that such structures may have been dated wrongly at other Anglo-Saxon sites.²⁴ Burnt stone features have usually been interpreted as evidence for cooking. Despite the fact that it has been suggested that those found at Snape have been the remains of cremation pyres, there is the possibility that they were used for preparing meals. Reconstructions of the features have shown that the fire was hot enough to melt a wine bottle and that it burnt for several hours.²⁵ This is sufficient heat to roast an

²⁰ Grave 2; Evison, *Alton*, 71–2.

²¹ J. Timby ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Empingham II, Rutland: Excavations carried out between 1974 and 1975*, Oxbow Monograph 70 (Oxford: Oxbow, 1996).

²² In the early 1980s Leslie Alcock developed a system of distinguishing certain groups within the Anglo-Saxon society according to their grave goods. Certain textual/legal terms were compared with social groups, so that the *thegn* was associated with the alpha grade of society and swords were included as grave goods for males of this group. The comparable female 'kit' contains, alongside expensive brooches and gemstones, also bronze bowls, glass vessels and weaving battens; 'Quantity or quality: the Anglian graves of Bernicia', in: V. Evison ed., *Angles, Saxons and Jutes: essays presented to J. N. L. Myres* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 168–83.

²³ T. Pestell, 'Burnt stone features', in: Filmer-Sankey and Pestell eds., *Snape*, 259–61.

²⁴ Pestell, 'Burnt stone features', 260.

²⁵ Pestell, 'Burnt stone features', 261.

animal, or prepare a large meal. The burnt stone features are in the south-east corner of the excavated cemetery, south of mounds 4 and 6. Two of them (f 1794 and f 1775) are very close to inhumations 44, 45 and 46, two of which (G 44 and 46) contained no grave goods. One of the burnt stone features showed a well-defined rectangular shape (f 1849) and yielded almost 3.5 kg of charcoal. Charcoal is found regularly in early Anglo-Saxon burials, usually in small quantities on the body or in the fill. Similar charcoal deposits have been observed in Merovingian mortuary rites,²⁶ and Bonnie Effros has suggested that they may constitute remnants of feasts.²⁷ The cemetery at Snape contains some very high-status boat burials. The fact that none of hearth structures were found immediately adjacent to these high-status graves need not preclude that food preparation could have taken place at this site. Meals could have been prepared at the hearths and then taken to the graves. The occasional 'charred' animal remains, such as the bone found in the fill of the seventh-century G 69 at Butler's Field, suggests that such grave goods were either deliberately cremated aside from the inhumation, or were remains from cooked leftovers. Burnt wood from G 25 at Apple Down has been explained as remains of a disturbed cremation or pyre,²⁸ but no urn fragments seem to be left. The excavators have noted various un-urned cremations at Apple Down, but there is very little other evidence for another body.

The presence of 'hearths' at cemeteries may suggest cooking, but this still leaves the question of whether the body was in any way present and whether there could have been structures surrounding the grave where the mourners could have partaken of a meal with the dead, or be fed while they paid their last respects to the body displayed in the grave. A pit at the cemetery of Great Chesterford contained bones from a horse, ox and chicken. The pit was in the vicinity of G 129, which contained the inhumation of a young woman, which could not be dated. Whether these animals were related to her funeral is not clear, but the presence of such pits in the cemetery should indicate that animals were prepared, if not slaughtered here. As shown before, the residues of animal bone in graves are not always 'choice cuts' – sheep molars, feet and heads are more likely than a rib of beef – and perhaps the edible parts of such animals were consumed elsewhere.

Eating with the dead, if it had not been *prima facie* a Germanic custom, could have become fashionable through contact with the Roman world. In pagan Rome several meals were eaten to commemorate the dead, the first at the grave on the day of the funeral.²⁹ The cemetery of Great Chesterford, with its 'seeping and persistent Roman background',³⁰ may have been a place where funerary rituals were shaped by both the existing population and the Anglo-Saxon settlers.

²⁶ Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology*, 165.

²⁷ *Creating a Community*, 89.

²⁸ Down and Welch, *Apple Down*, 38. The upper fill contained copper-alloy fragments that were fused by heat.

²⁹ Paxton, *Christianizing death*, 23; other meals were eaten on the ninth and fortieth day after death, the anniversary of the dead person's birthday and on festivals of the dead, in particular the Parentalia in February. See also Effros, *Creating a Community*, 74.

³⁰ H. Hamerow, in a review of V. Evison's *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Great Chesterford*, *Archaeology Journal* 152 (1995), 471–2.

There is ample evidence for food deposits in former Roman provinces, such as Frankia and Alemannic areas. While these seem to occur in the pagan graves, in the Christian period special edifices, the so-called *cellae memoriae*, were erected in cemeteries, so that the living could hold a meal at the memorial service. One such *cella memoriae* has been found under the minster of Bonn, and Janssen claims that many early churches in the Rhine area started their lives as earlier cult buildings erected for such purposes. These may be the descendants of wooden buildings that have been found in Merovingian grave fields.³¹ Bonnie Effros describes the ample food offerings that have been found in Merovingian churches and sepulchres.³²

Anglo-Saxon cemeteries contain a number of structures. So far structures and post holes have not been examined as to whether they could be some form of *cellae memoriae*, but there are indications that such buildings may have been present in England as well. Buildings from the early medieval period were made of wood and are often indicated through the presence of post holes, as in the example of a lozenge-style structure at Melbourn (Cambridgeshire). The cemetery of Spong Hill apparently seemed to contain a structure in the middle of the grave field. Single post holes found in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries have so far been interpreted as the remains of grave markers. It has been suggested that some kind of temporary pointer was needed to avoid the cutting of already existing burials when a new grave was dug. Nevertheless, there are plenty of overlying and cut graves, which seems to contradict this function. Alternatively, they could have been intended to operate as markers of grave groups, such as kin groups, and indicate where to bury the next generation. In any case, even without post holes bodies are carefully laid out, and there seems to have been some knowledge of where previous burials could be located. Unless such markers refer to burial zones, their haphazard occurrence in the cemeteries does not seem to follow distinct patterns. In many cases there is more than one post hole, which would be sufficient to mark a grave (similar to the simple wooden crosses found in many East European cemeteries), but often there are two, three and sometimes four post holes around the grave. For example, Sewerby G 49, which contains a vessel placed on the backfill of the bodies, was surrounded by post holes. Four-hole structures are sometimes aligned symmetrically and resemble miniature versions of building outlays, which were found at settlements. This may suggest that these posts are indeed remnants from some kind of temporary *cella memoriae*.

The cemetery of Spong Hill seems to contain a rectangular enclosure (581), cutting the areas of cremation and inhumation burial.³³ Thirteen pits and hollows were found close to the cemetery, and post hole group 5, situated at the north-western edge of the cemetery seemed to have served as a funerary structure, since it overlay two cremations.³⁴ The pits mainly contained pottery sherds and

³¹ Janssen, 'Essen und Trinken', 330.

³² *Creating a Community*, 74–5.

³³ Rickett, *Spong Hill, Part VII: Settlements*, 42.

³⁴ Rickett, *Spong Hill, Part VII*, 41–2 and 47.

animal bone, as well as occasional objects, such as wires. The cemetery at Melbourn was in use for a good one hundred years from the late sixth to the early seventh century, and 52 graves contained the bodies of 57 individuals; previous excavations suggest that the site was much more extensive.³⁵ Animal bone from the fills was in a fragmentary state, and only in one instance of animal bone could be identified (sheep or goat),³⁶ but there are a few vessels that could symbolise food. The most intriguing aspect of Melbourn is the presence of structures (Plate 8), one of which is a lozenge-shaped four-post structure (G 46), surrounded by a cluster of graves. The ditch enclosing this structure contained Bronze Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon remnants, including sherds. Graves at Melbourn seem to have been frequently 'reused' for subsequent burials, so that the relationship between objects and individuals is obscured, but a number of vessel mounts from wooden vessels and some near-complete ceramic pots were discovered. These were generally placed above the head, with exceptions. Vessels seem to be clustered in groups, one at the western edge of the excavation, left of the lozenge-shaped structure,³⁷ the other group surrounding the four-poster structures at the eastern side (G 38, G 39 and G 40). Two of the superimposed burials to the north and of the lozenge-style structure also include a vessel (SG 71 and SG 77, in both cases ceramic). Another seven-post structure was found to the west of it (G 20). While secure dating can only be achieved for two of the structures, they are clearly foci for the surrounding Anglo-Saxon burials and have been discussed as 'shrines'.³⁸ Whatever purpose these buildings served, the inclusion of vessels in graves suggests that food and drink is indicated as part of the relationship between the dead and those who watched their burials.

At Apple Down, 33 timber structures were found in a mixed cemetery of 121 inhumations and 64 cremations. The site was dated to the late fifth to early sixth century, with burials continuing into the late seventh century.³⁹ Some of these structures are very small (1.4 m x 1.5 m), which does not seem to be big enough to house a party of mourners. Not all of them overlie burials, though in most cases cremation burials and inhumations are situated underneath, as for example, the structure surrounding G 99 and G 93 (a mature male in a multiple burial, and an elderly female). In a few cases charcoal is found within these constructions. Animal bone from this site includes edible (cattle, deer, sheep, fowl) and indigestible species (such as foxes and water vole). Bone was mainly found in the topsoil and some in graves, but the excavators do not regard them as 'food offerings'.⁴⁰

³⁵ H, Duncan, C. Duhig and M. Philipps eds., 'A late migration/final phase cemetery at Water Lane, Melbourn', *PCAS* 48 (2003), 57–134, at 57.

³⁶ Duncan, Duhig and Philipps, 'Melbourn', G 1163 (sub-group 65), the grave of a 25- to 35-year-old woman, buried with textile tools.

³⁷ These are SG 56, SG 63 and SG 67, all of them dated to the final phase of the cemetery.

³⁸ Duncan, Duhig and Philipps, 'Melbourn', 125; this is based on John Blair's revaluation of Anglo-Saxon 'pagan shrines', 'Anglo-Saxon pagan shrines and their prototypes', *ASSAH* 8 (1995), 1–28.

³⁹ Down and Welch, *Apple Down*, 213.

⁴⁰ Down and Welch, *Apple Down*, 188.

The structures are interpreted as purpose-built houses for cremations.⁴¹ It is quite possible that the 'housing of the dead', as evident from chambers and mounds, may have also extended above ground.

In some cases post hole structures contain even further indication that they were some form of temporary structure over the grave. G 6 at Castledyke, a sixth-century inhumation of a mature male, contained what has been described as a 'hearth' at the head. The grave was also situated beneath two post holes, which could support the idea of a temporary structure being erected over the grave, while some form of food preparation took place.⁴² Altogether twenty-five graves with post holes were found at Castledyke, and it may be that others were overlooked.⁴³ Nineteen graves were adjacent to a single post, but four graves had structures on both sides. Most post hole burials are situated in the north-east corner of the cemetery.⁴⁴ Only one of them (G 128) could be classed as a high-ranking grave, which is the burial of a mature woman, who was interred with a copper vessel repair clip in the grave fill. Such repair clips have been found from a number of sites, and often residues of wood are still attached to them. It seems that the vessel, or at least a part of it, was interred after the body was covered. Post hole structures may have served as a temporary house of the dead, and it seems that at least in a few cases food and drink symbolism was a part of what happened beneath these structures.

Single posts could have held up thatched roofs, comparative to parasols found along Mediterranean beaches today. A temporary building in a cemetery, which lies away from settlements, as many of the early Anglo-Saxon sites do, could serve as a place where funerary rites can be performed, and where the body, if necessary, is sheltered from the elements. As observed from post-Conversion sites, such as Yeavering, it seems that in the spacing of bodies the living did no longer go 'out to the dead', but rather moved the dead into their neighbourhood. A good example is the middle Anglo-Saxon settlement period at Yarnton, where a small cemetery is in close proximity to the west of the buildings. These graves are close to the occupation site and all seem to stem from Christian contexts.⁴⁵ The same place has revealed a small timber building, which had first been assumed to have been a granary, since it contained a large deposit of grain in one post hole, but which is now assumed to have been a chapel. Grains are not an unusual deposition in burials, and may have been associated with burial rites. One of the earliest Anglo-Saxon handbooks of penance, the *Penitential of Theodore*, based on the decrees by Theodore of Tarsus, who was archbishop of Canterbury from 668 to 690, for example, forbids the burning of grain *ubi mortus est homo*, 'where a man has died'.⁴⁶ Penitentials appear to have originated in Ireland and were

⁴¹ Down and Welch, *Apple Down*, 29.

⁴² Drinkall and Foreman, *Castledyke*, 35.

⁴³ Drinkall and Foreman, *Castledyke*, 27. Graves with identified post holes were: 6, 7, 11, 12, 25, 42, 71, 73, 96, 88, 113, 128, 135, 151, 155, 163, 166, 167, 168, 177, 181, 184, 185 and 206.

⁴⁴ This was an area of dense burials; G. Drinkall, 'Mortuary practices', in: Drinkall and Foreman, *Castledyke*, 331–7, at 335.

⁴⁵ A. Boyle, 'People and burials', in: Hey ed., *Yarnton*, 75–6, at 75.

⁴⁶ *Qui ordine facit grana, ubi mortus est homo pro sanitate viventium et domus V annos poeniteat*, 'He who causes grains to be burnt where a person has died for the health of the living and the house, should

known from the sixth century.⁴⁷ They were used as pastoral handbooks for a priest so that he could minister to his parishioners. A penitential will contain a catalogue of sins and the appropriate penance that should be levied on the person by the priest after confession. Most manuscript versions of penitentials have survived as part of larger codices, rather than the small handbooks that must have been in the possession of individual priests. Anglo-Saxon penitentials were written in both English and Latin, and four vernacular versions have survived.⁴⁸

This, of course, is not a reference to the burial place, but appears to refer to rites, which were practised in the home. Penitentials were copied and edited and also adapted to the needs of the respective communities. Audrey Meaney has recently claimed that the context of 'burning grain' in *Theodore* implies that the body is lying in the house, but that shorter penitentials, such as *Pseudo-Cumean* suggest that this is done while the man is in the grave.⁴⁹ It is possible that even in the post-Conversion period not all rituals for the dead had to occur by the graveside.

Since not all graves contain animal bone in the backfill, the decision of who would be feasted at the graveside may have depended on membership of a certain group. For example, from the cluster of people buried with fowl at Castledyke three of the burials had post holes. The one grave containing fowl without a post hole marker (G 165) contained a vessel that shows possible external sooting traces, which could indicate that this was a cooking pot. Whatever the relationship was between these people, their spacing in one part of the cemetery and their association with food stuffs seems to indicate a connection. No family traits could be discovered, but, there does not always have to be a blood relation to be buried in a similar way. Children's graves, for example, show some similarities. They are more likely to contain a complete pot than other graves, and in most cases the pot is placed near the head. In other instances the connection may be via a shared space of the cemetery: some sites, such as Great Chesterford, appear to contain clusters of infant burials. This may be based on the conviction that children are a special group of people that require their own space. The large eighth-century building at Flixborough was surrounded by four graves, of which two were located along the walls in west-east alignment, and two other burials outside at the south end of the building.⁵⁰ The bodies in these graves differed from those found at the cemetery associated with this site: they were nearly all those of children between three and twelve years of age, bar one, which contained the

do penance for 5 years'; Friedrich Wasserschleben ed., *Die Bussordnungen der abendländischen Kirche* (Halle, 1851, reprint Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1958), 200.

⁴⁷ A. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 19–60.

⁴⁸ These are the *Confessionale Pseudo-Egberti*, *Poenitential Pseudo-Egberti*, the 'Canons of Theodor' and a 'Late Handbook for the Use of a Confessor'. For the manuscript tradition see: C. Cubitt, 'Bishops, priests and penance in late Saxon England', *Early Medieval Europe* 14 (2006), 41–63.

⁴⁹ A. Meaney, 'Old English legal and penitential penalties for "heathenism"', in: S. Keynes and A. Smyth eds., *Anglo-Saxons: Studies presented to Cyril Roy Hart* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 127–58, at 156–7.

⁵⁰ Loveluck, 'Conspicuous consumption', 86.

body of a young woman with a child *in utero*.⁵¹ The burial of humans inside settlements is not all that unusual,⁵² but what is remarkable is that all skeletons showed evidence for illness.⁵³ This closeness to what appears to be a hall and the human interaction that usually went with such buildings, notably feasting, could indicate that children and the frail needed special care, which could only be administered in proximity to the living.⁵⁴

This thought may be mirrored in the high proportions of infant burials that surround some Middle Saxon churches, such as Brandon, Staunch Meadow (Suffolk),⁵⁵ where the graveyard to the north of the church contained a high proportion of infants or juveniles. A similar case is the east side of the cemetery of Whithorn Priory (Cumbria), which is densely packed with infant and children's graves. They are too young to be members of the monastic community and will have been drawn from the lay population.⁵⁶ In some places there seems to be a correlation between the burial spaces of children and that of people with disease or disability at both pre-Christian and post-Conversion sites.⁵⁷ The conjunction of the burial of children and the diseased throughout the Anglo-Saxon period may be based on their legal status as 'minors'.⁵⁸

Not all children's burials occur in what could be regarded as desirable locations. At the Oxfordshire cemetery of Yarnton a small group of burials was discovered on the settlement.⁵⁹ These were the bodies of two children who were buried inside the enclosure ditch, and a prone inhumation that overlay at least four further children. One of the burials (3169) had a sherd of pottery in the grave fill.⁶⁰ The skeletons all seem to be associated with phase 3 of the occupation (dated to the mid-ninth century), and it is curious why these children should be buried in an

⁵¹ Loveluck, 'Conspicuous consumption', 86.

⁵² For example, the early Anglo-Saxon Village of West Stow had child burials underlying some of the buildings; I am grateful to Sally Crawford for this information.

⁵³ Loveluck, *Flixborough*, pers. comm.

⁵⁴ C. Lee, 'Forever young; children's burials in Anglo-Saxon England', in: S. Lewis-Simpson ed., *Viking Age: Youth and Age in the Medieval North* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

⁵⁵ R.D. Carr, A. Tester and P. Murphy, 'The Middle Saxon settlement at Staunch Meadow, Brandon', *Antiquity* 62 (1988), 371–7, at 374.

⁵⁶ P. Hill, 'Chapter 2', in P. Hill ed., *Whithorn and St Ninian: the excavation of a monastic town 1984–91* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing for the Whithorn Trust, 1997), 170–71.

⁵⁷ Examples are the burial of a leper among children at the 'eavesdrip' of the church at the late Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Raunds Furnell, Northamptonshire. John Blair has recently observed that there seems to be a widespread practice of burying children under eavesdrips, which may be associated with the idea that water running from the roof (over the altar) is sanctified in this act; *Church*, 471, n. 201. For further examples of eavesdrip burials, see Jo Buckberry's forthcoming article, 'On sacred ground: social identity and churchyard burial in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire c 700–1100', *ASSAH* 14. I am grateful to Jo Buckberry for sending me a pre-print. Pre-Christian examples of the burial of diseased people with children are the sixth-century site of Beckford B, Hereford and Worcester, where the graves of two lepers are overlain by children's burials, and the seventh-century leprous woman in G 18 at Edix Hill. At Nazeingbury, Essex, a man with severe congenital deformities is buried alongside a group of children. It may be purely accidental, but sites with a 'good' pathology often seem to have very few infant burials, P. Huggins, 'Excavations of Belgic and Romano-British Farm with Middle Saxon cemetery and churches at Nazeingbury, Essex, 1975–6', *Essex Archaeology and History* 10 (1978), 29–117, at 51.

⁵⁸ Sally Crawford, pers. comm.

⁵⁹ A. Boyle, 'Burial rite and status on the Yarnton middle Saxon settlement', in: Hey, *Yarnton*, 75.

⁶⁰ Hey, *Yarnton*, 163.

area that seems to have been used for what in other places appears to be the waste-disposal.⁶¹ At Butler's Field the body of a c. ten-year-old boy (G 74) has one of the most deviant burials of the whole cemetery:⁶² the body is laid out prone in the grave and seems to have been decapitated before burial. Animal bone was found in the backfill of this burial, which is located in the south of the cemetery, in what appears to be a row of widely spaced burials all roughly aligned east-west.⁶³ The fact that a child appears to have been subjected to some form of capital punishment may seem astonishing, but the threshold to adulthood, and therefore full legal responsibility, seems to occur around the age of twelve in Anglo-Saxon England.⁶⁴ The most intriguing observation is that some form of feasting is indicated in the backfill. The grave was not disturbed and the bones could have not come from another disturbed burial.

The deposition of vessels with children could be interpreted as a continuation of care. Disease as well, makes a person special and requires the care and compassion of others. Vessels and food stuffs may not only be interpreted as a remnant of feasting, but may signify feasting those who had been less likely to fend for themselves and who had been in need of care. Such sentiments are more difficult to envisage in the case of the 'executed' youth, but perhaps here as well there is an understanding that a life had been cut short, which may have needed some form of consolation for the mourners.

However, not every burial of a diseased person was fashioned with a vessel. The exemplary examination of pathology that was applied at Edix Hill allows us to compare possible pathology with other information. Similar to the clustering of certain groups observed elsewhere, there seem to be spaces for those who needed more care, such as infants and people with disease. One example is G 84, the double inhumation of a woman and a new-born infant. The baby was placed under the head of the adult, who had suffered multiple injuries, leading to deformation of the legs. A post hole is visible at the end of the grave. This burial is immediately adjacent to a burial of a woman suffering from spondylosis (G 83).⁶⁵ Both graves are in a cluster of burials to the south of G 88, the sixth-century double inhumation of two men with a bucket. These men seem to have been laid on top of each other, or the grave could have been reused for the burial of the younger man. Post holes are immediately to the west of this burial. The dating of these graves has been associated with the first phase of the cemetery. The grave of a leper (G 93) is at the western fringe of a ditch, which is also the burial place of a man suffering from tuberculosis (G 66). This Iron Age ditch sees a number of multiple

⁶¹ Especially as there was a contemporary cemetery to bury them in.

⁶² The grave could not be dated.

⁶³ The row of graves continues towards the more densely packed northern part of the cemetery and contains predominantly sixth-century burials.

⁶⁴ Adults appear to get a different set of grave goods than children at most Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, and it has been observed that the threshold of being buried with the adult 'kit' is around the age of 12. This seems to be corroborated by later Anglo-Saxon lawcodes; Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England*, 39–45. See also the laws of Athelstan, who sets the legal age for thieves at twelve years of age; Liebermann, *Gesetze I*, 150–1.

⁶⁵ Spondylosis is a degenerative and extremely painful condition that results from a 'fusing' of the spinal vertebrae.

inhumations, which are dated to the sixth century. There is a possibility that some form of relationship may exist between the people interred in this space.⁶⁶ Since vessels at Edix Hill, as shown before, seem to occur at focal points of the cemetery, it is feasible to regard G 66 which contains the remains of a bound wooden vessel as the central grave for this group of people.

Post holes, as indicated above, also denote focal spaces. The majority of post hole burials at Castledyke were associated with the sixth century,⁶⁷ and contain predominantly female inhumations.⁶⁸ The most striking feature of these burials is that most of these inhumations were positioned in a crouched or semi-crouched posture; in two cases they were prone burials, and in one of them the body appeared to have been beheaded (G 71). Indications of feasting were not apparent with every burial, but G 155 and G 206 included animal remains in the fill. One early inhumation contained cattle bone, which appears to have been gnawed (G 195). G 184, again a double inhumation, or at least the reused space of an adult and teenager, contained herring bone and mammal remains. The whelk shell in G 11 may or may not represent a food deposit. Pottery sherds and vessels, which could be interpreted as symbols for eating and drinking, were found in a number of graves. G 163, an elaborate burial of an adult woman, contained not only Romano-British pottery sherds in the fill, but also a vessel at the shoulder.

The purpose of post hole structures cannot unquestionably be identified with feasting, since a number of burials accompanied by post holes contain no food remains or replacements, but the evidence of buildings in some cemeteries, together with the burnt stone features found at Snape cemetery, suggests that at least feasting was possible in the graveyard, and that some temporary structures may have served precisely this purpose. As shown before at Castledyke and other sites, food deposits, as well as pottery sherds, follow patterns. Animal bone found in graves may have multiple meanings, which refer to the gender, age and status of the deceased. Only the comparison of relative wealth and burial practice will establish the value system that was associated with such objects.

There is enough evidence to propose that the grave was a place where eating and drinking had an important role and even took place on site. The way in which feasting is indicated comes in a number of different forms, and may change between regions and over time. As observed at Castledyke, post hole structures are mainly associated with sixth-century female inhumations, but most animal remains were found in seventh-century graves. While the evidence for feasting at the grave in the sixth century is mainly found on the outside of the burial, such as hearths and post hole structures, we are more likely to find the symbols of feasting, such as the animal remains and vessels, in the grave in the seventh

⁶⁶ There are, however, no osteological or pathological features that would identify them as members of the same family.

⁶⁷ Nine burials were identified as sixth-century, two were regarded as sixth-to-seventh centuries, six are associated with a seventh-century context, three were dated to the fifth-to-sixth century and four could not be dated.

⁶⁸ Fifteen burials were sexed as female, or probably female, three were identified as male and six burials could not be gendered.

century. The inclusion of meat cuts in the grave display suggests that food for the dead is deliberately made visible.

The intriguing remnants that we have from Anglo-Saxon cemeteries pose the question of why they occur in some graves, but not in others. It is feasible to think that they were given to special people, some of those whose rank and position suggests that they were able to feast others or others who were in need of care, such as children or the sick. In some cases the use of food and drink objects may have been restricted to focal graves. Most burials containing evidence for feasting, including back-filled graves with vessel or animal remains, are not the most splendid on site. There could be a number of reasons for this. I have already suggested that feasting for more high-ranking people may have taken place elsewhere, but it is also possible that in the case of a 'hasty' burial, as required for a body with infectious disease or an execution burial, there is no time or space to display the body for a wake. Perhaps in these cases the funeral feast is moved to the grave. It may also be that some of these feasts are conservative in nature, particularly with fifth- and sixth-century inhumations, which may have continued to use a form of 'accessory vessels' in their rites.

What is evident is that from the earliest stage onwards a process of replacement takes place, where complex messages about the nature and position of the deceased, as well as their relation with the living, are represented through symbols. These may range from pottery sherds (as shorthand for a dish), a vessel or animal bone. It is to be assumed that with the coming of Christianity at least some of these symbols were appropriated into the rites of the new faith. Victoria Thompson has shown that a variety of burial practices are evident from the ninth century, of which charcoal burial is the earliest variant.⁶⁹ She assumes that this form of burial is associated with a growing concern about a 'clean burial', in which the dead receive their own delineated space within the grave. Charcoal, however, is also found in a few pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon burials,⁷⁰ as well as in earlier Merovingian inhumations. While charcoal can be used to delineate graves, in the same way as stone linings or other structures, it is also feasible that some could have derived from the remnants of fires on which funerary meals have been prepared at home or in the graveyard. On the Continent the custom of including charcoal continues after the Conversion.⁷¹ Fire pits or stones are often found in the vicinity of elaborate graves, and may have been part of an elite display.⁷² While the amount of charcoal is significantly higher in examples from post-Conversion sites and may have been used to separate the body from surrounding areas, there is at least a possibility that it is derived from a source associated with funerary feasting.

The diminishing grave goods in Christian Anglo-Saxon burials have often

⁶⁹ Thompson, 'Constructing Salvation', 231.

⁷⁰ As, for example, Butler's Field G 36/2, a redeposit. The grave cuts other burials and the charcoal may have been used to separate the body from surrounding burials.

⁷¹ Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology*, 165. The detection of charcoal can be made difficult since it can be easily confused with other decaying organic matter; *ibid.*, 166.

⁷² Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology*, 166.

been explained by an allegedly contemptuous attitude by the Church towards the deposition of such goods. In fact, there are no edicts that specifically forbid the inclusion of goods in the grave.⁷³ The literary evidence we have for the early Anglo-Saxon Church is remarkably silent on this matter.⁷⁴ Alain Dierkens and Patrick Périn observe that the Church often did not interfere in the organisation of burials, regarding them as the province of the family or society in general, or a matter of tradition.⁷⁵ Bonnie Effros, in her analysis of Merovingian mortuary rites, comments that the early Church only interfered in the deposition of grave goods if burials threatened the integrity of Church property, such as the wrapping of the body in liturgical cloth, which was forbidden by the Council of Clermont in 535.⁷⁶ This lack of interest by the Church results in a limited amount of knowledge on Middle Anglo-Saxon burial practices, which comes almost exclusively from archaeological evidence.

Helen Geake has commented on the vast economic implications the arrival of Christianity brought with it. The needs of the Church, she writes, were enormous.⁷⁷ Could it not be that an economic shift had taken place and that instead of displaying the dead with assorted goods, such items could be paid to the Church as a kind of donation, which would guarantee prayers to save the souls of the deceased? Early Anglo-Saxon monasteries were often founded to house family members. Instead of impressive grave goods, which would vanish in the earth, it would have been far more effective to support a monastic community and equip it with precious altar cups and sumptuous crosses, which would be visible for a long time and remind the congregation of their benefactor every time they were used.

The deposition of elaborate grave goods and the building of spectacular funeral markers in the 'final phase' of Anglo-Saxon paganism, such as tumuli or mounds, could also indicate that an elite needed visual demonstration of its predominance. This is a period when smaller kingdoms are amalgamated into larger territories, and funeral rites may be part of claiming a legacy in a territory that has just been acquired by an overlord. The final phase, in particular, sees the reuse of Bronze Age or Roman cemeteries, which may be associated with claiming ancestry in a specific area. Martin Carver has remarked that the cemeteries of the fifth to the seventh century are at least 'partly the product of an ideological argument between two political positions that threw post-Roman society

⁷³ H. Geake, 'Burial practice in seventh-and eighth-century England', in: M. Carver ed., *The Age of Sutton Hoo: the seventh century in North-Western Europe* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), 83–93, at 89–90. The same idea was expressed by Alain Dierkens and Patrick Périn, who state that the Church never condemned the deposition of grave goods, though numerous Christian authors liked to emphasise its vain and illusory character. Indeed, the Church gave support to laws that laid down severe penalties for grave-robbing. A. Dierkens and P. Périn, 'Death and burial in Gaul and Germania, 4th–8th century', in: L. Webster and M. Brown eds., *The Transformation of the Roman World AD 400–900* (London: British Library, 1997), 79–95, at 82.

⁷⁴ Bullough, 'Burial, community', 185–6.

⁷⁵ Dierkens and Périn, 'Death and burial', 81.

⁷⁶ B. Effros, *Caring for Body and Soul: burial and afterlife in the Merovingian world* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2002), 44.

⁷⁷ Geake, 'Burial practice', 91.

into conflict. To label them “Christian” or “pagan” would be too crude.⁷⁸ He suggests that cemeteries were the principal means of establishing and remembering identity in pre-literate, post-Roman Britain and that they amount to a declaration of an ideology, which may include the promotion of ethnicity. Feasting equipment, such as drinking sets, demonstrates power: the ability to command surplus, the capability to entertain a retinue and the resources to create memory of a ‘good time’. Once power shifts to a greater organisation, such as a state or kingdom, such physically limited symbolism become futile, because funerals can only be witnessed by a small number of people. It is much more appropriate now to ‘invest’ one’s riches in the foundation of a church or monastery.⁷⁹

The spacing of the bodies at late Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, such as Raunds, suggests that social distinctions persisted for the dead. Coffins, linings and grave markers were used from pagan times onwards⁸⁰ and were still employed to mark gradations in social status.⁸¹ The funeral feast, however, had moved away from the grave, and the remnants of these feasts are no longer archaeologically identifiable to us.

Feasts are gift-exchanges and, as shown, such exchanges can be symbolised. It is not quite clear where this transaction took place in the pagan period, but with the arrival of Christianity church buildings may have become focal points for such transactions in the transition period, since the altar was understood as a place where offerings could be made. This marks it out not only as a place of great sanctity, but also a place where saints and increasingly those who had become members of the community were remembered. Thus ‘gifts’ to the foundations could be made *super altare*, ‘on the altar’.⁸² One such example from Anglo-Saxon England is the charter of Æthelberht of Sherbourne (S 333), for example, which is offered on the altar. This is the clearest example for the exchange of goods against commemoration through the inclusion in the liturgy. The altar as a place of legal interaction occurs in other contexts as well: penitence for an oathbreaker who had sworn his oath on the altar is much harsher than swearing on the cross.⁸³ This double function of the altar as the place of the transformation of

⁷⁸ M. Carver, ‘Cemetery and society at Sutton Hoo: five awkward questions and four contradictory answers’ in: C. Karkov, K.M. Wickham-Crowley and B.K. Young eds., *Spaces of the Living and the Dead: an archaeological dialogue*, American Early Medieval Studies 3 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999), 1–14, at 1.

⁷⁹ Geake suggests that a profitable line of research could be the examination of such alternative investments; ‘Burial practice’, 92.

⁸⁰ See, for example, the fifth/sixth century cemetery at Sewerby, Yorkshire.

⁸¹ Recent work of post-Conversion burial by Jo Buckberry, Dawn Hadley and Victoria Thompson has shown that there are clear choices in burial options that are applied in relation to the social position, perceived state of grace and possible gender identity; Buckberry, ‘On sacred ground’; Hadley, ‘Negotiating gender, family and status in Anglo-Saxon burial practices in England, c 600–950’, in: L. Brubaker and J. Smith eds., *Gender in the Early Medieval World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 301–23; Hadley and Buckberry, ‘Caring for the dead’; Thompson, *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004).

⁸² A. Angenendt, ‘*Cartam offere super altare*: zur Liturgisierung von Rechtsvorgängen’, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 36 (2002), 133–58.

⁸³ Three years as opposed to one year; *Penitential of Bede*; Wasserschleben, *Bussordnungen*, 226.

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the host and the holiest of Christian feasts, where offering and community are intertwined, as well as a place of legal significance is important for the understanding of the transformation from the *sacrificia mortuorum* to the replacement of donations against remembrance.

The Grateful Dead: Feasting and Memory

GUY HALSALL has used the expression ‘scene-making’, borrowed from Virginia Woolf,¹ to describe the mnemonic value of burial displays. He associated ‘scene-making’ with the rituals that occur around Merovingian burials and which serve to enhance the family’s standing in the memory of those who participated in the funeral. The burial takes on an act of performance, with the translation of the body from the home to the grave field, feasting around the grave, and the display of goods. The distribution of food and drink in this context is a form of gift-giving.²

The remains of animal bone and vessels found in early Anglo-Saxon graves not only indicate a meal with the dead, which was celebrated in their honour at the graveside, but also that the dead themselves deserved a certain portion of such a meal, which was therefore left on or in the grave. There is no indication that anybody seriously expected the deceased to consume this sustenance, rather it was a symbolic gesture that exemplified the care that was lavished on the dead and which reiterated their role as members of a community.

Material evidence that indicates some form of funerary feasting ceases after the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Text sources give a little information about how funeral services were conducted, and the earliest of them mainly concern religious men and women. According to the seventh-century *Penitential of Theodore*, based on Theodore of Tarsus, who was archbishop of Canterbury from 668 to 690, monks or religious men were supposed to have had a funeral service in a church, which required the dead monk to be carried to the church, where the breast was anointed and masses are sung for them. They were carried to the grave *cum cantatione*, ‘with chanting’.³ Masses were to be celebrated for them on the day of the burial, as well as the third day (after the burial) and monks were usually remembered each week with a mass where their names would be recited.⁴ The service for laymen is supposed to include neighbours and family.⁵ Nearly two centuries later, the Old English penitential labelled *Pseudo-Egbert*, which is essentially a translation of a Frankish penitential (*Halitgar’s Penitential*),

¹ Halsall, ‘Burial, ritual and Merovingian society’, 332; Virginia Woolf explains how she uses associative scenes, not all of them literary devices, to create memory (‘marking the past’), *Moments of Being: Unpublished autobiographical writings*, ed. J. Schulkind (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 64–137, esp. 122. I would like to thank Leena Kore-Schröder for kindly providing me with the text.

² Halsall, ‘Burial, ritual and Merovingian society’, 332.

³ Wasserschleben, *Bussordnungen*, 206.

⁴ Wasserschleben, *Bussordnungen*, 206.

⁵ Wasserschleben, *Bussordnungen*, 206.

instructs that according to Roman law a layperson should be brought to the church where his breast is anointed and a mass is celebrated for him, after which he is translated to the grave *mid sange*, 'with singing'.⁶ The most interesting point is that the grave should be closed as soon as the body is in it, suggesting that this was not always the case.⁷ While the body is still the focus of funerary preparations, this gives a clear indication of removing other activities away from the grave.

Helen Gittos describes the patchy evidence for the adoption of churchyard burial in Anglo-Saxon England.⁸ Document sources indicate that there was no great haste to create consecrated grounds for the newly converted, since the Church, according to Gittos, placed little emphasis on church burial, and there is no canon law that forbids using local sites.⁹ Burials around minster churches begin in the eighth century, but this does not mean that everyone is automatically buried there.¹⁰ At the Middle Saxon settlement of Hamwic (Southampton), at least nine cemeteries have been excavated within the vicinity of the town. All of them were very small and house no more than a hundred bodies, which is not enough for the estimated population at the site.¹¹ The suggestion that these cemeteries were satellites to a larger inhumation ground cannot so far be verified through excavation, and we may rather be looking at a certain percentage of people who were buried in the graveyards in and around Hamwic.

Gittos thinks that churchyard burial may not have become common until the tenth century, but by the time of Cnut burial in consecrated ground was seen as a right.¹² She declares, however, the concept of a sacred space was known in the Irish Church and may have filtered through to Anglo-Saxon England at a much earlier stage than our text documents suggest.¹³ Churchyard burial is only one of the options available during the eighth and ninth centuries, and perhaps the lack of coherence in burial rites before the tenth century reflects a continuation of local traditions. Dawn Hadley has shown that there is a great range of burial options in Northern England.¹⁴ She argues that the concern about the 'final phase' of furnished burials has blinded us to the continuation of certain rites.¹⁵

The role of the Church in the administration of the funeral becomes more

⁶ R. Spindler ed., *Das altenglische Bussbuch (sog. Confessionale Pseudo-Egberti)* (Leipzig: Verlag Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1934), 188.

⁷ Spindler, *Pseudo-Egberti*, 188.

⁸ H. Gittos, 'Creating the sacred: Anglo-Saxon rites for consecrating cemeteries', in: Lucy and Reynolds eds., *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, 195–208, at 195.

⁹ Gittos, 'Creating the sacred', 202. The Continental cousins of the Anglo-Saxons, however, are admonished by an eighth-century injunction to bury their dead in consecrated ground, and not at pagan sites: 'Iubemus ut corpora christianorum Saxonorum ad cimiteria ecclesiae deferantur et non ad tumulus paganorum,' Boretius, *MGH Capitula*, 26.22.

¹⁰ Gittos, 'Creating the sacred', 202.

¹¹ A. Morton, 'Burial in Middle Saxon Southampton', in: S. Bassett, *Death in Towns: urban responses to dying and the dead, 100–1600* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 68–77, at 68.

¹² Gittos, 'Creating the sacred', 201–2; see also Cnut I. 22.5, Liebermann, *Gesetze der Angelsachsen* I, 304–5; see also Blair, *Church*, 463.

¹³ Gittos, 'Creating the sacred', 206. Gittos, however, thinks that the rite for consecrating churchyards emerged in the tenth century and was formalised by the early eleventh; 208.

¹⁴ D.M. Hadley, 'Burial practices in Northern England.

¹⁵ Hadley, 'Burial practices', 210.

important during the early medieval period, and with this change occurs a transformation of pagan rites into Christian rituals. John Blair has observed that ninth-century Frankish clerics are adamant that burial arrangements should be overseen by a priest.¹⁶ Blair links the development of consecrated grounds to the need for churches to control burials and to retain jurisdiction over burial rites,¹⁷ which increasingly became an important source of income. However, the first liturgy for the consecration of a churchyard is not before the 970s, but already the laws of King Athelstan exclude perjurers from being buried in consecrated ground.¹⁸

The transition from the deposition of actual goods to symbolic requests demands a change of attitude towards the dead. It is clear that even early Anglo-Saxon deposits had a symbolic function (such as vessel remains for feasting). Now there is a shift from items that are buried with the dead to markers above ground. High-ranking burials had already been marked out through elaborate structures above ground in the pre-Christian period, particularly during the seventh century, when mounds and inhumation near prehistoric barrows become popular. The reuse of Bronze Age monuments may indicate a new way of advertising power in the landscape, since it links the occupants of ancient burial grounds with the current inhabitants. Interestingly, some of these sites are highly selective and accommodate only parts of the population. Post-Conversion burials, as well, are highly indicative of social distinctions, since kings, bishops and inhabitants of religious houses chose to be buried in churchyards from the middle of the seventh century onwards.¹⁹ Hadley has observed that there is increased evidence for commemoration of the dead above ground. Stone markers, such as grave slabs, crosses and other sculptures, were five times more likely in eighth- and ninth-century burials in Northern England than in the tenth century.²⁰

The diversity of burial options that were possible in the early post-Conversion period may have accelerated the implementation of replacement rites. The mnemonic function that feasting occupied as part of the grave ritual can be enhanced through more permanent markers, such as sponsorship of crosses, liturgical implements and other objects that in turn reward the donor with commemoration. In a literate society the name of the donor can be recorded, which allows the temporal and sensual feast to be replaced with a much more lasting celebration.

Elaborate grave markers and crosses tell of the need for memory, for creating a permanent display of commemoration for the dead. While instructions for the religious part of the funeral became more commonplace, there is very little information of what else happens between death and burial. Surviving depictions, such as the procession of King Edward's body in the Bayeux Tapestry, illustrate the exceptional rather than the norm. Nevertheless there are occasional snippets from

¹⁶ Blair, *Church*, 464. Hincmar of Reims advises churchyard burial in 856, *Capitula Synodica*, PL 125 (1879), 794. This may be a reference to Gregory who writes in the *Dialogues* that burial around churches is beneficiary to the dead, since it guarantees intercession.

¹⁷ Blair, *Church*, 464.

¹⁸ Blair, *Church*, 464; see also Liebermann, *Gesetze I*, 2, Athelst. 26, 164.

¹⁹ Hadley, 'Burial practices', 210, who gives a number of early examples for Northern England.

²⁰ Hadley, 'Burial practices', 224; see also Blair, *Church*, 468–71 for regional chronology.

the eighth-century transition period, such as Bede's description of the burial of St Æthelthryth. Before she succumbed to a cancerous tumour the saint requested burial among the rows of nuns.²¹ The choice of such a space was possibly an act of humility, since she regarded her illness as punishment for wearing pretty necklaces earlier in life. Bodily deformity as an indicator of visible sin becomes a popular theme of religious writings during the earlier Middle Ages.²² It is clear that abbess has been absolved when her body is exhumed sixteen years later by her successor Seaxburh, in order to be translated to the church at Ely. They find her body is healed and shows no signs of decomposition.²³ The spacing of the body in the churchyard is the topic of another of Bede's stories, which relates that a monk, who is a skilled craftsman, but a terrible drunk and much loath to spend time in church or at psalm-singing, is struck by an illness that leads to his death. Subsequently he is buried *in ultimis monastrii locis*,²⁴ in the furthest area of the monastery, and no one dares to say prayers for him or sing masses for his soul, since he refused to repent before death. This example underlines two new developments: first, a concern with the spacing of the dead in consecrated ground, which indicates that there are places for the 'deserving' and some sites which may be less attractive; and, secondly, the need to atone for transgressions, even after death, which has to be secured during life.

While funerary feasting may have been celebrated in a number of pre-Christian contexts, it is Christianity that introduces the idea of perpetual care. According to Michel Lauwers, it is Augustine who in his treatise *De Cura pro mortuis gerenda* postulates for the first time that the living owe care to the dead.²⁵ While for Augustine funerary rites are also a source of consolation for the living, subsequent writers, such as Isidore, Hrabanus,²⁶ and in particular Bede, develop ideas concerning the connection and obligations between the living and the dead.

Two aspects indicate what might have happened to a meal at the graveside. The first is that the introduction of Christianity in Western Europe brought with it the idea of purgatory, a place whence all but the holiest of souls departed. According to medieval theology, man was born sinful and would not go straight to heaven, but spent some time in a place in-between.²⁷ The time spent in purgatory could be shortened by prayers of intercession. Secondly, the living had to make sure that such care was given to them after death and to begin to invest in their memory during life. To understand the link between gift-giving and intercession we have to look at changes in the perception of salvation which occurred from the sixth to the eighth century. It was by no means certain that a good life

²¹ *HE*, iv. 19, 392–6.

²² D. Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith in Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); C. Lee, 'Changing faces: leprosy in Anglo-Saxon England', in: C. Karkov and N. Howe eds., *Conversion and Colonization* (Tempe: ACMRS, 2006), 83–108.

²³ *HE*, iv. 19, 394.

²⁴ *HE*, v. 14, 504.

²⁵ M. Lauwers, *La Mémoire des Ancêtres: le Souci des Morts: Morts, rites et société au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996), 67–8; see also: *De Cura pro Mortuis Gerenda*, ed. Zycha, 619–60, at 658.

²⁶ Lauwers, *Mémoire des Ancêtres*, 69–73.

²⁷ The idea of purgatory is not fully formed before the high Middle Ages, but is already developed in eighth-century sources; J. Crick, 'Posthumous obligation', 198.

would ensure a passage to salvation. This time could be shortened through the intercession of the living. Communities of professionals had to be employed to pray, intercede and look after the dead and provide for their spiritual wellbeing. Penitence could continue after death. The relationship between the priest and the penitent was not unlike that of lord and retainer, who received a service in return for feeding, clothing and nourishing his man. *Memoria* was a retrospective service, but had to be paid for in advance during the lifetime of the subject of commemoration, or at least by the heirs after death. Quantity here ensures quality: the more people can be persuaded to pray for the soul, the shorter will be the time the soul spent in suspension. Being remembered was therefore vital, and various ways were devised in which the living ensured that they were not forgotten.

Commemoration thus takes the place of elaborate funerary rites. The idea of a place in-between, where souls had a last chance of being redeemed, first occurs in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, where heaven and hell are not immediately revealed.²⁸ Those with lighter sins could be redeemed through the *ignis purgatorius*, 'fire of purgatory', which was en route to heaven. It seems that Gregory's ideas struck a particular cord with Anglo-Saxon writers. Bede categorises the places of the dead in his description of the vision of the Northumbrian Dryhthelm, where he names four distinct places for the dead: apart from heaven and hell there are two places in-between, of which one is unpleasant and painful, the other pleasant.²⁹ In his homily on Advent Bede writes that some of the blessed people will rest in paradise, but that some will go to the flames of purgatory, where they will be made clean from the stains of their vices.³⁰ Even the most virtuous will not go straight to heaven, but be stuck in a place in-between. The dead are no longer able to move themselves from one place to the other and therefore are dependent on the interaction of the living. Bede acknowledges that such sinners can be absolved through the penance of the living, through almsgiving, fasting, weeping and sacrificial offerings.³¹ As I will show below, the need for spiritual assistance created through the concept of purgatory leads to the development of ritual commemoration, a practice where Bede again is at the forefront of thought.

Corresponding to the concerns of what happens to the soul after death, there are a number of changes that put the memory of a person, which may have previously been transmitted orally as family or tribal lore, in a much more permanent frame. Thus the 'scene-making' of spectacular pre-Christian funerary rites could be prolonged through elaborate grave markers above ground. The introduction of literacy opened new channels of recording the name of the deceased. Feasting, too, has a place in the permanent relations between the living and the dead. Funerary feasting seems to continue, but we now also have a much more

²⁸ Angenendt, 'Theologie und Liturgie', 89.

²⁹ *HE*, v. 12, 488–96. See also Angenendt, 'Theologie und Liturgie', 93.

³⁰ D. Hurst ed., 'Homilia II in advent', *Beda Venerabilis Opera Omnia: Opera Homiletica*, CCSL 122 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), 13.

³¹ Hurst, 'Homilia II in advent', *Beda*, 13.

prolonged form of sustaining the living through land bequests. The dead, in return, are remembered during the celebration of the Eucharist.

According to Arnold Angenendt, as early as the third century a wife could ask for intercession for her dead husband as a *refrigerium interim*, 'refreshment-in-between', for which she would provide a donation.³² This implies that the soul of her dead husband would be 'fed' in transition, while she provided for those who would pray for him. This marks a fundamental shift in the role of the Church in the care of the dead: it no longer just involves the family and friends, but there is now need for pastoral assistance as well.

From late Antiquity onwards there is a strong sense that spiritual health and physical health are interrelated, based on the understanding that Christian religious are in the succession of Christ who healed the sick.³³ When the body could not be healed, either because it was too sick or too old, then the soul had to be protected on the last journey. This was done by administering the *viaticum*, literally a provision for the journey into the next world.³⁴ The *viaticum* has its roots in Roman paganism, but in the Christian understanding this was the Eucharist that was given as close to the time of death as possible (and even administered to corpses).³⁵

In the case of death-bed administration we may assume that the *viaticum* resembled the host. However, the Eucharist was initially a substantial meal, which included the giving of thanks (*eucharistia*) with the blessing (*eulogia*). The early Church used bread and wine for the *eucharistia* meal, where the word for 'bread' could stand for food in general. Roman customs included giving potions of wine and food as sacrifice at memorial meals. By the late fourth century the Eucharist, as we know it, had been established. The Council of Hippo (393) declared that nothing more should be offered at the sacrament than what Christ himself had consumed at the Last Supper (i.e. bread and wine mixed with water). Fruits, honey and milk may still be offered at the altar on high feast days or baptisms, but should be distinguished from the sacrament.³⁶

The dispensation of the *viaticum* occurred in a death ritual that was developed during the fourth and fifth centuries, the *Ordo defunctorum* of the Roman Church.³⁷ This saw the necessity for priests or deacons to be present at the last rites, which were accompanied by a set list of psalms.³⁸ In the Christian West, new prayers were added. For example, the eighth-century *Bobbio Missal* includes

³² A. Angenendt, 'Missa specialis: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Entstehung der Privatmessen', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 17 (1985), 153–221, at 195.

³³ Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*.

³⁴ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 33; J. Bazelmans, 'Moralities of dress and the dress of the dead in Early Medieval Europe', in: Y. Hamilakis, M. Pluciennik and S. Tarlow eds., *Thinking Through the Body: archaeologies of corporeality* (New York: Kluwer, 2002), 71–84, at 76–7.

³⁵ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 33.

³⁶ A. McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: food and drink in early Christian ritual meals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), esp. 89–95. See also 1 Corinthians 10: 16–17, which forbids any other sacrifice or communal meal.

³⁷ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 37.

³⁸ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 39–44.

a prayer *pro anima kari*,³⁹ which invokes the descendants of Adam and thus the ancestors of all humans to aid the dying. Death and salvation are no longer processes between man and his God, but now require the community of Christians.

The importance of the Eucharist and the involvement of the Christian community in death-bed rituals is underlined in descriptions from Anglo-Saxon contexts. Bede gives a description of the last rites performed for the poet Cædmon.⁴⁰ Since the monk feels that his end is nigh, he asks for the Eucharist. With the host in his hands he asks for the forgiveness of all of his fellow monks and, fortified with the *caelesti uatico*, 'the heavenly viaticum', he prepares to die. Bede's emphasis is on Cædmon's preparation for death, but neither his translation nor his funeral are described. A little more information is given in Bede's *Life of St Cuthbert*. Cuthbert dies after receiving the Eucharist, and his death is announced to other members of the congregation who seem to have gathered for a vigil in the church.⁴¹ His body is then placed on a ship and taken to Lindisfarne, where it is buried in a stone sarcophagus to the right of the altar in the church. The water in which the body was washed acquires miraculous qualities.⁴²

The liturgy surrounding the Eucharist from the time of Ambrose onwards contained the opportunity of offering *super altare*.⁴³ This, in the words of Ambrose, replaces animals that were sacrificed before.⁴⁴ In his homily on death, he distinguishes between the sacrifices of the Old Testament, and the 'sacrifice of praise', which now substitutes any other form.⁴⁵ The altar is the table of the Lord, to which all faithful are invited. However, lay members during the early medieval period would have rarely taken the sacrament, since it required a reconciliation with God, which could only be granted once and which required penance and absolution.⁴⁶ The Eucharist was usually given during the absolution of the last rites just before death. In Anglo-Saxon England more frequent penance was advocated, and we may assume that by the late Anglo-Saxon period lay people would have had the sacrament a little more often, but no more than three times a year (at the highest feast days).⁴⁷ Instead priests and clerics would consume the host, while the congregation offered their prayers.

³⁹ 'for the care of the soul'; Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 63, n. 67.

⁴⁰ *HE*, iv. 24, 420.

⁴¹ B. Colgrave ed. and trans., *Two Lives of St Cuthbert . . . Bede's Prose Life* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1968, reprint of 1940), 284–6.

⁴² Colgrave, *Two Lives of St Cuthbert . . . Bede's Prose Life*, 288. The anonymous shorter version of the life of St Cuthbert also describes him being robed in priestly garments and an offering (of the host) being placed on his breast before he is placed in a wax shroud; Colgrave, *Two Lives of St Cuthbert . . . A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne*, 130.

⁴³ K. Stevenson, *Eucharist and Offering* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1986), 76.

⁴⁴ *De Sacramentis*, PL 16 (1880), 462–4; see also Ambrose, *De incarnatione domenicæ sacramento*, PL 16, 859–60.

⁴⁵ *De Bono Mortis*, PL 14, 570. The comment is made in reference to Psalm 115 (116). Ambrose was known to Anglo-Saxon writers, and this homily survives in two eleventh-century manuscripts; M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 276.

⁴⁶ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 35–7.

⁴⁷ The *Regularis Concordia* encourages monks to receive the Eucharist daily, on the grounds that Augustine points out that Christians ask for daily, not yearly bread; Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, chap. 23,

Christianity could offer much more than a place for the dead: the opportunity of being remembered for eternity. The temporal 'scene-setting' of lavish funerary rites, with the hope that the living may remember the dead, could be replaced by written records. Thus, the pomp of funerary displays and opulent reminders⁴⁸ were no longer essential (though they continued to exist) in order to evoke memories of those who were buried there. At the same time, the invocation of names during liturgical remembrance allowed them to be remembered in more than just one place.

Objects, which previously may have been included in the grave, could now have been given to the Church as a *sawolsceat*, 'a payment for the soul',⁴⁹ either as a bequest or through the family of the dead person. In return the body would receive a Christian burial in sanctified ground. In some cases the *sawolsceat* is linked to forms of remembrance by the ecclesiastical community. The Church encouraged the commemoration of the dead at regular intervals, during which their family and friends were given the opportunity to pray for the deceased's soul.⁵⁰ The payment of the *sawolsceat* was not just a lump sum of money, as the term would suggest, but could be paid in goods as well. Helen Gittos has recently suggested that references to the *sawolsceat* are not common before the tenth century, and that the payment was not codified before the eleventh century.⁵¹ The development of a 'burial tariff' may be connected to the growing importance of churchyard burial in the tenth century. Since this resting place is no longer just the privilege of a few, perhaps there is a need for clear instructions of how this service is to be paid for.

Even the earliest charters, wills and legal documents use terms such as *pro remedio animæ meæ* and have a clear purpose that their donations are meant to pay for intercession.⁵² One of the earliest authentic charters is the grant of Frithewald, sub-king of Surrey, to Chertsey in 672–4. He bequeaths land for the foundation of the abbey with the proviso: . . . *tu quam posteri tui pro animæ meæ remdio intercedere debeatis*, 'so that you and you successors may be bound to intercede for the benefit of my soul'.⁵³ Blair has observed a boom of endowment after 670, which sees a downturn after 700.⁵⁴ While these bequests are generally lists of objects, lands or revenues, they convey an understanding that these bequests will 'feed' the community of those who pray for intercession. This is made even more explicit in certain documents. The will of Badanoth Beotting,

19. This perception was certainly seconded by Late Anglo-Saxon writers, such as Ælfric. Magennis notes that Ælfric understood 'daily food' first as the literal food the body requires, secondly as the precept and teaching of God, and thirdly as the Eucharist; Magennis, *Anglo-Saxon Appetites*, 163–4.

⁴⁸ '*pompa funeris, agmina exsequiarum sumptiosa, dilligentiae sepulturae, monumentorum opulenta constructio*'; Hrabanus Maurus, *In vigiliis defunctis*, PL 110 (1864), 128–30, at 129.

⁴⁹ Also referred to as 'soulscot'.

⁵⁰ Masses could be said on the third, sixth and fortieth day after the funeral.

⁵¹ Gittos, 'Creating the sacred', 201.

⁵² See, for example: B 6 (Æthilberht to St Peter and Paul at Canterbury in 605); B 3 (Aethelberht to St Andrews, Rochester in 604); B 58 (Æthelræd of Mercia to Malmesbury in 681).

⁵³ D. Whitelock ed. and trans, *English Historical Documents c500–1042* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), 440, B 34. The will is preserved in a late cartulary from Chertsey (BL, Cotton Vitellius A.xiii).

⁵⁴ *Church*, 87.

dated to 837, has specific instructions of what should be done with his donation.⁵⁵ Badanoth donates 16 yokes of arable land near Canterbury, which he received from King Æthelwulf, to the community at Christchurch after the death of his immediate family. His wife and children are reminded to *gefeormien to minre tide swæ hie soelest ðurhtion megen*, ‘to pay a *feorm* on my anniversary as much as they can afford’, whereas the beneficiaries are reminded to *higon us mid heora godcundum swe gemynen swæ us arlic 7 him ælmeslic sie*, ‘remember us in their divine services, so that this memory is honourable for us and charitable for them’.⁵⁶ After the death of Badanoth’s wife and children the estate is to be given to the refectory of the house, and a feast is to be celebrated on his anniversary for the benefit of his soul.

We have a snippet of information of what was consumed during the funerary feast. A fragmentary late Anglo-Saxon will, written on the fly leaf of Bede’s *Commentary on Luke*, indicates that not one, but two funerary feasts were celebrated in memory of the person.⁵⁷ The will, which was set up by a man named ‘Wægen’ at Bury St Edmunds, stipulates that for the first funeral feast five ores should be paid for malt and fuel, 42 pence for bread, 17 pence for a pig. Additionally two ores should be paid for a bullock and one ore for three bucks, eight pence for cheese and three for fish and four pence for milk.⁵⁸ The second funeral feast is even more expensive, since the donor allows eleven and a half ores for the feast and several individual gifts, but here no food and drink is specified.⁵⁹ The will is incomplete and the first passage seems to indicate how much should be paid for the coffin, pallbearer and clerics who attend the funeral.⁶⁰ The deceased not only pay for the candles that are lit during their mass, but also sustain the priests who perform the service. As well as sustenance, the dead also provide firewood, *hældygge*, for the funerary feast. And, just as suggested in the bone assemblages from pre-Christian burials, the mourners could expect to be feasted on a variety of food stuffs, including beef and pork. The mention of a second funerary feast is unique in this will, but has been taken by Max Förster as evidence for a Scandinavian custom.⁶¹

⁵⁵ A.J. Robertson ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (Cambridge: CUP, 1956, 2nd edn), 10 and notes 269. The will is preserved in Ms Cotton Tiberius II, 42, and Robertson thinks that the date should be nearer 845.

⁵⁶ Robertson ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 10.

⁵⁷ Cambridge, Pembroke Ms 83, fol. vi; Robertson ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 252. The manuscript was dated to the eleventh or twelfth century by Kerr; N. Kerr, *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), 124–5.

⁵⁸ ‘. . . 7 fyf oræ at te fyrræ ærlfæ at malt 7 at hældygge 7 twa 7 fæouhærti peniges at bræd 7 seuentene peniges at an swin 7 twa ore an reþær 7 an aræ bruces 7 viii. pe. An cese 7 þræ peniges at fysc 7 fæouer pæniges at milch’; Robertson ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 252.

⁵⁹ Robertson ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 252.

⁶⁰ ‘. . . 7 twælf oræn under prestæs 7 dæcanas 7 clærcæs 7 fyf oræ at his þruth 7 an 7 twænti peniges his hoferbredles 7 seuen peniges at hale 7 twa ore 7 an ære at bræd 7 hoþær hære at an flychca 7 an buch 7 seuen 7 twænti peniges at wax’, ‘and twelve ores among the priests and the deacons and clerics and five ores for his coffin and 21 pence for his pall and 7 pence for ale and two ores, and one ore for bread and another ore for a flich of bacon and for a buck and 27 pence for wax’, trans. Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 252–3.

⁶¹ M. Förster, ‘Der *Vercelli Codex* CXVII nebst Abdruck einiger altenglischer Homilien der Handschrift’, *Studien zur englischen Philologie* 50 (1913), 20–179, at 157.

The Grateful Dead: Feasting and Memory

Another late Anglo-Saxon legal document from Bury St Edmunds, now bound with the earliest version of the *Rule of St Benedict*,⁶² stipulates that the monks of this monastery should consume fish on the anniversary of the death of King Edward the Confessor, *seo caritas þe Baldwine abb hæfð geunnon his gebroðrum for Eadwardes sawle*, ‘the *caritas* that Abbot Baldwin had granted to his fellow brothers for the soul of [king] Eadward’.⁶³ It is interesting that this legal document, which is essentially a list of food rents payable to the community at St Edmunds, is bound with an earlier manuscript of the Old English version of the Benedictine Rule.

CREATING MEMORY

English sources seem to retain some late indications for funerary meals, but the transformation from funeral feast to remembrance feast needs explanation. Here Continental scholars have examined the mechanisms of replacement. Nikolaus Kyll, looking at the funerary rites in the Trier region of Germany in the ninth century, has argued that cults, which were derived from late-antique ceremonies for the dead and included feasting in memory of the deceased, were no longer a private affair at this time. They had to be celebrated in a church, rather than in the graveyard or in the home.⁶⁴ The *sacrificia mortuorum*, pagan sacrifices for the dead, a term that goes back to Psalm 105 (106): 28, where it describes the sacrifices that the lost tribes ate before the Flood, were grave goods in form of food, and, according to Kyll, it is immaterial whether they were placed into the grave or put on top of it. Such gifts were commonplace in the Frankish regions from the sixth to the eighth centuries, but by the year 900 the meal had moved from the grave to the house of the deceased and was now transformed into the ‘vigil’ (*Totenwache*), which denotes a meeting of friends and family in honour of the dead person, immediately before the burial. The vigil is now divorced from the funeral, which was conducted by a member of the clergy. Such vigils, which seem to have been celebrated in the presence of the body at times, included meals, drinking and dancing.⁶⁵

Sacrificia mortuorum were explicitly forbidden by the Council of Leptines in 743.⁶⁶ This edict is taken up again in one of the capitularies from Charlemagne’s reign in 760, where they are defined as *sacriligio super defunctos id est dadsisas*, ‘sacrileges over the body of the dead, that is *dadsisas*’.⁶⁷ The Germanic word *dadsisa* is a compound of *dad*, ‘dead’ and *sizan*, ‘to sit’, and seems to refer to

⁶² Oxford, Corpus Christi College Ms 197; the legal document has been dated by Kerr to the early twelfth century, *Catalogue of Manuscripts*, 431; the writ was edited by Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 193–201.

⁶³ Robertson ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 196.

⁶⁴ Kyll, *Tod, Grab, Begräbnisplatz*, 184–6.

⁶⁵ Kyll, *Tod, Grab, Begräbnisplatz*, 38–9 and 199.

⁶⁶ *Karlmanni principes capitulari*, MGH, *Capitularia Regum Francorum I*, ed. A. Boretius (Hanover: Hahn, 1883), 25.

⁶⁷ Boretius, MGH, *Cap. I*, 223.

people who sit with the dead, i.e. people who attend a vigil over the body. The Frankish cleric Hincmar repeatedly forbids priests to participate in the *conviviis defunctorum*, feasts for the dead,⁶⁸ which is evidence that at least in some cases these were still celebrated in the ninth century. This is not the last reference to the custom of taking food to graves: a late example is after the murder of Charles the Good (1127), when his killer Bosiard and his accomplices take beer and bread to his tomb according to the custom of 'pagans and sorcerers' and sit around it 'as if it was a table, eating and drinking over the body of the dead count'.⁶⁹

Meals around the grave were not only part of pagan Germanic, but also Roman rites. In many cultures even after their bodily demise the dead are in need of the care of the living, which was often expressed through sustenance or ritual gifts, a fact that was neither denied nor contradicted by the early Christian Church. The purpose of such feasts, as already described, is to create a communal memory, which allows the living to remember the dead in a certain light. The development of Christian forms of commemoration is highly complex and strongly linked with the cult of saints, the development of liturgical remembrance and memorial feasting. Essentially it is based on the Last Supper, where Christ asked his disciples to share the bread and wine in remembrance of him.⁷⁰ However, not all commemorative meals had their roots in the Judaeo-Christian traditions, and it appears that the early Christian Church also tapped into memorial celebrations of pagan antiquity.⁷¹ Such meals for the dead were known as *refrigia*, *mensa*, *convivium* and *laetitia*.⁷² They were not necessarily approved by theologians; certainly Augustine saw such feasts as an excuse for wild drinking, and too close to heathen celebrations.⁷³ Giles Constable claims that commemorative meals were held by pagans and Christians alike, and would have been celebrated immediately *post mortem*.⁷⁴

There is a certain weariness in the writings of medieval writers, such as Hrabanus,⁷⁵ but the attitude of Church was benign toleration of pointless rites that may console the living, though these should not be carried out as part of the

⁶⁸ *Capitula*, PL 125, 777–8, also at 776. It is to be assumed that Hincmar was known in Anglo-Saxon England, since he wrote the *ordo* for the coronation of Judith, daughter of Charles the Bald, with King Aethelwulf.

⁶⁹ Galbert of Bruges: *The Murder of Charles the Good*, ed. and trans. J.B. Ross (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982, reprint of 1957), 263. I would like to thank Dhira Mahoney for the reference.

⁷⁰ Luke 22: 19.

⁷¹ Oexle, 'Mahl', 404. Arnold Angenendt also points out that in late antique thought the living were supposed to share the table with the dead, but presumes that there must have been similar Celtic and Germanic rites; *Geschichte der Religiosität in Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 682.

⁷² Constable, 'Commemoration of the dead', 172.

⁷³ Oexle, 'Mahl', 407; L. Verheijen ed., *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera: Confessionum libri XIII*, book 6, chap. 2, CCSL 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), 74–5.

⁷⁴ Constable, 'Commemoration of the dead', 173.

⁷⁵ In Homily 58, *In Vigiliis Defunctorum*, Hrabanus states that all the elaborate funerary arrangements are no longer useful for the dead. Their hope is that the compassion of the living and their commemoration, given as alms and prayers and which will move God. The only suitable sacrifice is the communion, and since the dead can no longer partake in it the living should do so in their memory; PL 110, 128–30, at 129.

Christian faith.⁷⁶ Occasional reprimands, as the one by Hincmar in 852, occur in Frankia, but contemporary comments from Anglo-Saxon clerics are not recorded. Usually it is the only involvement of clerics or abuses of Christian feasts that create such reactions. Caesarius of Arles, for example, reprimands those that use the saints' feast days to get drunk, incite others to do so as well and sing disturbing songs, lead chorals and perform devilish dances.⁷⁷

In the third century Christian relatives of the deceased could still gather for a meal around the grave. The *oblaciones annuae*, 'yearly sacrifices' for the dead, were celebrated by the family of the deceased with a meal at the graveside either on the third, seventh or ninth day after the funeral, and after this on every anniversary of the death.⁷⁸ The Church tried to replace such meals with the Eucharist, which would be celebrated over the grave of the dead at the funeral and encouraged the living to donate the *oblaciones* to the poor.⁷⁹ How long *dadsisas* were celebrated at the graveside of Northern Europe is a matter of speculation, but it is clear that the Church tried to take control not only of the burial, but also of the funeral and its rituals. The correspondence between Boniface and Gregory II records the confusion of pastors as what to do with folk customs of 'refreshments for the dead'.⁸⁰

Two mechanisms further assisted the development of replacing the funerary feast with forms of ritual commemoration. Firstly, once Christianity had become the state religion in most European countries, the Church felt growing discomfort with the different rites they had encountered and tolerated previously among the converted populations; and secondly, a fundamental shift in the care of the dead occurred between the seventh and ninth centuries. At the centre of this development stands the *memoria*, which came to denote the liturgical commemoration of the dead. The practice of *memoria* encompassed not only the funeral service, funeral and vigil, but also a meal for the dead, at which it was supposed they were in some sense present.⁸¹ *Memoria* is a Christian ritual, despite the fact that it may have replaced pagan rites for the dead. Judaism does not acknowledge a cult for the dead, but may have had a meal in their memory.⁸² The apocryphal Second Book of Maccabees recommends prayers and sacrifices for the dead so that they may be redeemed from sin.⁸³

Memoria meant more than just memory or recollection. It comprised all acts

⁷⁶ Lauwers, *La Mémoire des Ancêtres*, 75: 'Cependant, dans la mesure où ils ne portaient pas atteinte à la foi Chrétienne, les rites funéraires, bien que jugés inutiles dans la perspective du salut, jurent tolérés. Le souci de la sépulture ne fut pas considéré comme illégitime, dans la mesure où il renvoyait à un sentiment lié à nature humaine. Car s'ils ne soulagent pas les morts, les rites sont une "consolation" pour les vivants.'

⁷⁷ *Sunt in alii, qui, pro hoc solo desiderunt at natalica martyrum convenire, ut inebriant, ballando, verba turpia decantando, coros ducendo et diabolico more saltando et se subvertant, et alios perdant*; G. Morin ed., *Caesarius of Arles, Sermones I*, CCSL 103 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953), 242.

⁷⁸ Angenendt, 'Missa specialis', 196.

⁷⁹ Angenendt, 'Missa specialis', 197–9.

⁸⁰ Lauwers, *La Mémoire des Ancêtres*, 68–9; see also Rau, *Briefe*, 92.

⁸¹ Oexle, 'Die Gegenwart der Toten', 30–5.

⁸² Oexle, 'Mahl', 404. The *sacrificia mortuorum* described in Psalm 105 (106): 28 are a sign of the debasedness of the antediluvian races.

⁸³ 2 Maccabees 12: 43–6.

performed in honour of the dead.⁸⁴ The development of individual *memoria* is closely associated with the emergence of the cult of saints, who were remembered in regular intervals from the third century onwards. The separation of saintly *memoria* and individual remembrance occurred only very gradually.⁸⁵ An essential for memory seems to be the creation of a space for commemoration. While the furnished grave or body may have served as a focus or *aide-mémoire*, the complex nature of written 'memory' seems to have replaced the necessity for the presence of the body. Otto Gerd Oexle has pointed out that the recording of names was pivotal in the Middle Ages, since the calling of the name would evoke the dead person and create a presence of them among the living. To medieval communities such a presence was important, since the person could intercede on their behalf. It was believed that the recollection of saints during the liturgy in particular would generate this presence, and the development of martyrologies and necrologies is closely linked to the importance of the commemoration of the dead. From the fifth century Church writers called the interaction between the living and saints a *communio sanctorum*.

Cults had developed around the tombs of martyrs, and the corresponding donations of foods to their graves had been popular since late Antiquity. To medieval people, saints were not 'dead' but continued to work miracles from their tombs, and saints' graves became places where the living could ask favours from them. It appears that in late Antiquity saints were treated in the same way as their dead family relatives, and all kinds of foods were brought to their tombs. The most important source of influence for the replacement of the *sacrificia mortuorum* was the fourth-century theologian Augustine of Hippo. Augustine writes in *De Civitate Dei* that food brought to the tombs of martyrs would be sanctified through having been taken there but should be eaten elsewhere or given to the poor.⁸⁶ The Church tried to dissuade Christians from these rituals by the creation of substitute celebrations, such as almsgiving and the development of a liturgical *memoria*.⁸⁷ For example, at the beginning of the fifth century the traditional day when Roman families celebrated their meal with the dead (22 February) was turned into the feast of the 'Chair of St Peter'.⁸⁸

The question of how best to 'care' for the dead is also pondered by writers such as Alcuin and Hrabanus Maurus.⁸⁹ In Merovingian Gaul clerics in the seventh and

⁸⁴ Constable, 'Commemoration', 169.

⁸⁵ Constable, 'Commemoration', 178.

⁸⁶ Dombart and Kalb eds., *Sancti Aurelii Augustini: De Civitate Dei*, chap. 27, 248; see also Constable, 'Commemoration', 175.

⁸⁷ Oexle, 'Mahl', 407–9.

⁸⁸ Oexle, 'Mahl', 408. Vestiges of the original association may have been inadvertently transferred to texts. For example, Ælfric's Old English version of the *Cathedra Sancti Petri* contains many stories of miracles the saint works during life, but also a vision of beasts, which Peter is asked to slaughter. These signify, as explained in the following interpretation, the heathen nations that Christ made clean with his coming and which were now to feed St Peter; Skeat, *Ælfric, Lives* 1, 219–39; the vision is based on Acts of the Apostles 10: 10–15. It also seems that at least on the Continent there was a sacrificial meal in February. The Capitulary of Charlemagne forbids *spurcalibus*, which are glossed as *epulae paganicae*; Boretius, *MGH Cap. I*, 223.

⁸⁹ Hrabanus Maurus: *In vigilis defunctis*, PL 110 (1864), 128–30: . . . cum ad ipsum sacrificum loco suo commemorantur, oretur, ac pro illis quoque id offeri commemorantur, 129.

eighth centuries increasingly pay attention to Eucharist celebrations on behalf of the dead and less to funerary feasting.⁹⁰ It seems that secular funerary feasting continued, but since this is not longer in the remit of the Church sources are few.⁹¹ That they did exist is clear from the injunctions, such as forbidding the *dadsisas* and later sources that deplore the unruly behaviour of mourners.

PENANCE

While the early Church may have not been very interested in what was done with the bodily remains of most of the laity,⁹² it was highly concerned with the state of the soul. The idea that proximity to a saintly burial or a church dedicated to the memory of a saint may assist the intercession for the soul precludes that the theological background for such thinking is widely understood. ‘Tariffed penance’ was introduced by Irish and Anglo-Saxon clerics.⁹³ Mayke de Jong writes that as early as 813 bishops had reasserted their authority over penitential matters.⁹⁴ Penitence required atonement, which could be granted against indulgences. Churches built on aristocratic land or at the behest of noble families could obviously be traded for providing salvation. Other forms of obtaining favour were sponsorship of liturgical objects, land bequests and the donation of books or stone crosses. No early wills have survived, but the variety of bequests mentioned in the correspondence of Anglo-Saxon clerics concerning charters and wills gives an indication of what could be traded ‘for the sake of the soul’.

A core belief of medieval thought is that any form of favour has to be ‘paid for’. A donation to the community of the shrine would make saints more inclined to listen and force them into a reciprocal relationship. Subsequently much income was generated through the absolutions of the sinful at these places, and it may have been in the interest of the Church to turn perishable gifts into hard *geld*. Soon whole ‘industries’ of clerical *oratores*, plus associated institutions for the sick and poor, developed around real or alleged tombs of martyrs. If no suitable body of a holy man or woman was at hand, a piece of bone or relic, or even the invocation of the saint’s name, was sufficient to create a space of ‘holiness’. Arnold Angenendt observes that by the sixth century some monasteries lived entirely on donations, so that monks no longer had to work for a living but generated their income through prayers. The eighth-century *Rule of St Chrodegang* (an enlarged version of which was translated into Old English) states that it is acceptable for a priest to take donations given for confessions or for the care of the living or dead. These

⁹⁰ Effros, *Creating a Community*, 78.

⁹¹ Effros, *Creating a Community*, 78.

⁹² Blair comments that even when churchyard burial had become customary, churches did not welcome the influx of bodies, while they very much liked the income generated from the *sawolsceat*; *Church*, 466.

⁹³ M. de Jong, ‘Pollution, penance and sanctity: Ekkehard’s *Life of Iso of St Gall*’, in: J. Hill and M. Swan eds., *The Community, the Family and the Saint: patterns of power in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 145–58, at 149.

⁹⁴ De Jong, ‘Pollution’, 149.

donations no longer have to be made in the form of alms for the poor, but can be handed over directly to the monastic institution or the priest, who then can decide himself how to spend them.⁹⁵ Some religious institutions went as far as to develop a set of 'currency tables' for such 'prayers for payers'.⁹⁶ Not all of these donations were given as money or religious objects (such as crosses or prayer books). Food was offered from the earliest time to churches in Western Christianity.⁹⁷ Donations of food were called *offere* and, according to Angenendt, were not understood to be sacrifices, but were intended to sustain the people of Church. It was commonplace in Carolingian times to sponsor the *offere*. The idea behind it was the thought that God would reimburse donors for their blessings, since the donation maintained His servants. In Antiquity, food donations were linked to the Eucharist. By the fourth century, the Eucharist had taken on the form of bread and wine to symbolise the foods of the Last Supper. Sponsorship of the places in which the Communion was celebrated, though, remained.⁹⁸ Wills and charters from Anglo-Saxon England are testament to the fact that for donors the maintaining of a religious community through gifts and land secured their intercession after death. Intercession usually took place during the Eucharist, which is a commemoration of Christ's sacrifice but at the same time also a commemoration of pre-empted funerary feast, celebrated in anticipation of the crucifixion.

SOULMONEY

Redemption through ablutions was not only open to the deceased, but at the same time could be paid for to help the purification of the living. Essentially the concept is based on the idea that wrongs can be righted through compensation. According to Angenendt, *sacra oblationes*, masses celebrated to wash off sins, were an invention of Carolingian times.⁹⁹ Whereas previously the penitent was

⁹⁵ Angenendt, 'Missa specialis', 169–70; see also the Old English Rule of Chrodegang; A.S. Napier, *The Old English Version of the enlarged Rule of Chrodegang with the Latin original*, EETS OS 150 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1916), 49, 'Be ælmessena næme':

Gif hwa anon mæssepreoste his behat for his andetnysse behæt, oððe gif hwa hwylcum oðres hades preoste hwilc þing for his sealmsancge 7 for his gebedrædene behæt, for hine sylfne oððe for hwilc[ne] his freonda, cwicra oððe deadra, nyme þa ælmessan se mæssepreost oððe se cleric þe him man sylle, 7 ateo swa he wylle. Gif hwa þonne hwæt eallum preostum to gemænre ælmessan sylle, hæbbon þæt ealle gemænlice 7 leanian þæt mid mæssan 7 mid sealmsangum mildelice þam þe hit him doð.

'If anyone vows to a mass-priest his promise for his confession, or if anyone promises some priest of another rank something for his Psalm-singing and for his prayer help, either for himself or for his kinsmen [my emphasis], living or dead, the mass-priest or cleric should take the alms the man gives him, and take out what he wants. If anyone then gives something to all priests as communal alms, then all possess this collectively and pay for it kindly with masses and with Psalm-singing, for him who has done this.'

⁹⁶ Angenendt quotes an eighth-century manuscript from Reichenau, in which one *solidus* buys ten psalms or three masses and a pound buys twelve psalms and twelve masses; 'Missa specialis', 172.

⁹⁷ Food was donated to Roman Eucharist meals by the congregation; see McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 11–12.

⁹⁸ Angenendt, 'Missa specialis', 176–8.

⁹⁹ Angenendt, 'Missa specialis', 154.

excluded from communion and was only allowed re-entry after serving a specified period of penance, the ninth century saw a change in Church legislation. Now the penitent could begin 'paying' for his sins through the offering of gifts and resume his place within the prayers of a community. For example, a murderer, after five years and paying his dues, could continue to be remembered in the prayers of his contemporaries. Nevertheless, he had to wait another fourteen years to be readmitted to the Eucharist. During this time his spiritual wellbeing was essentially the same as that of a dead person: both were dependent on the intercession of their fellow men. The penitent, however, could shorten the time he was excluded from communion by paying for a private mass. The Church encouraged the gift-giving of laymen in order to purge their souls.¹⁰⁰ Men and women habitually brought sacrifices for the benefit of their souls and those of their dead relations. Angenendt shows how this system resulted in a regular 'penitential tariff system', which had its origin in Ireland but spread across Europe.¹⁰¹

Money paid as penitence was not a lightweight affair; some people had to pay their own body weight in silver as a penitence for fraud. Such hefty sums could, of course, only be paid by the very rich, but there were other forms of relief. In England, as well as on the Continent, land donations to the Church or the manumission of slaves were both regarded as suitable ways to alleviate sin. It is evident from a remark in the canon laws of Wulfstan that by the eleventh century the payment for sins had reached such proportions that priests had to be threatened with excommunication if they pressed the poor for payment of the administration of penitence.¹⁰²

It was believed that the Eucharist had special redemptive powers for penitents, and people were quick to be included in liturgy of religious communities. The *libri vitae* of monasteries include lists of members who have to be remembered with prayers of intercession during the liturgy. Monks and laypeople alike aimed to be included in the *liber vitae* in order to be remembered during mass and thereby continue to partake in the redemptive powers of the Eucharist, even after death.

The formation of special masses (sometimes called 'private masses'), which are votive masses and are detached from the office of the day, allows the names of the dead to be recollected during the liturgy. The development of special masses and necrologies can only be understood in the light of secular feasting, which results in special bonds and obligations, created through networks of 'friends'. It is linked to the idea that by becoming part of the congregation members will enjoy all the benefits of being part of this group, which primarily includes remembrance through prayers of intercession. A regular feature of special masses was requests for the intercession of saints and the dispensation of the Eucharist. The earliest

¹⁰⁰ Angenendt, 'Missa specialis', 161. He points to the Council of Maçon (585), which encouraged the 'bringing of bread and wine to the altars of Churches', so that they can get rid of their sins.

¹⁰¹ The earliest is the Penitential of Cumean from the middle of the seventh century. Psalms and genuflections, next to fasts and abstaining from wine and mead were the staple currency in the penitentials; Angenendt, 'Missa specialis', 163–4.

¹⁰² Cross and Hamer eds., *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection*, 70.

form of a special mass *pro defunctis* can be found in the mid-eighth-century Gallican *Bobbio Missal*,¹⁰³ which includes prayers for ‘our brothers and sisters, benefactors and those who have asked for our prayers, whether living or dead, whose alms we have taken as donations and whose souls we have inscribed for their memory and which are now lying on the holy altar’.¹⁰⁴

The request for inclusion in the prayers of fellow members seems to have its roots in monastic networks. This is particularly visible in early Anglo-Saxon sources. In the prologue to his *Life of St Cuthbert*, Bede asks Bishop Eadfrith to pray for the redemption of his soul and celebrate masses ‘as though I belonged to your family’, in accordance with what had been promised to him. He wishes the bishop to inscribe his name in the *liber vitae* of the monastery, which is a matter of urgency for him.¹⁰⁵ Prayers were exchanged, not only for services rendered, but also for gifts, which were supposed to make the recipient more likely to agree. These were prayers *pro defunctis*, but increasingly they also included the living. This development is an important step from the *memoria* purely as a service for the dead to the commemoration of the living sponsor. In her correspondence with Boniface Lioba asks him to pray for her dead father *and* her infirm mother. In return she sends a little gift, ‘so that the band of true friendship will be tied forever’. The letter also shows that fraternisation is a necessary part of this process: Lioba requests to renew her kinship with Boniface.¹⁰⁶ Kinship contains special obligations of care and is invoked whenever the need for special assistance arises. For example, when Boniface embarks on his arduous and uncertain mission to Germany he asks Eadburg to pray for him on account of their kinship.¹⁰⁷ Augustine writes in the *Enchiridion* that the souls of the dead in the intermediate state may be assisted by the prayers of their living friends.¹⁰⁸ Friend-

¹⁰³ Paris, MS.Lat. 13246. Gallican missals were used as liturgical handbooks in the Merovingian and Frankish areas before they switched to Roman rites.

¹⁰⁴ Angenendt, ‘*Missa specialis*’, 189–90.

¹⁰⁵ *Vita Cuthberti*, in: Colgrave ed., *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, 146.

¹⁰⁶ Rau ed. and trans., *Briefe des Bonifatius*, no. 29, 102:

Rogo tuam clementiam, ut memorare digneris prioris amicitiae, quam iam dudum cum patre meo copulasti, [. . .] ut pro anima illius preces offerre Deo non rennues. Necnon et matris meae memoriam commendo tibi, quae cognominatur Aebbe, quae tibi, ut melius nosti, consanguinitatis nexibus copulatur [. . .] Ego unica filia sum ambobus parentibus meis; et utinam, licet sim indigna, ut merear te in fratris locum accipere, quia in nullo hominum generis mei tanta fiducia spes posita est mihi quanta in te. Hoc parvum munusculum mittere curavi, non ut dignum esset tuae almitatis aspectui, sed ut memoriam parvitatatis meae retines, ne longa locorum intercapidine oblivione tradas, quin immo vere dilectionis ligatura reliquum nodetur in aevum.

‘I ask kindly to remember the friendship, which you have forged with my father a long time ago [. . .], so that you are not disinclined to offer a prayer of intercession for his soul to God. I also commend to you the memory of my mother, who is called Æbbe, and who, as you will surely know better, is related to you by the bonds of consanguinity [. . .]. I am the only daughter of both my parents, and even though I do not deserve it, I would hope to have you in place of a brother, because I can place my hopes into no one of my kin [an alternative reading is ‘sex’] with such faith as in you. I have sent you this little present, not that it would be worth anything in the light of your dignity, but so that you will remember my humble self and not forget me as a result of these long distances, so that the band of true delight will be tied forever.’

¹⁰⁷ Rau, *Briefe Bonifatius*, 104; see also no. 66, 204–6.

¹⁰⁸ E. Evans ed., *Aurelii Augustini Enchiridion*, CCSL 46 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), book 39, chap. 110, 108–9.

ship in a medieval context is not dependent on personal affection, but created by people who are obliged by the giving of gifts or reciprocal promises of commemoration.

The idea that missionaries secure the prayers of their fellow Christians is already known from the Bible. Paul asks the community at Rome for their prayers before he sets out for Jerusalem.¹⁰⁹ Joachim Wollasch sees the development of *memoria* as originating from the perils of early medieval missions. Missionaries wanted to ensure that, far from home in alien lands, they would not be forgotten by their peers.¹¹⁰ Thus the *peregrini* endeavoured to employ a wide circle of friends who would pray for them on what was often a journey without return. In most cases it was impossible for those left behind to know whether the person was alive or dead, since long distances made communication difficult. Thus missionaries secured their intercession in life, so that if they should die far from the homeland their souls would still benefit from spiritual assistance.

Women played an important part in the missionary movement and may have been instrumental for the commemoration of the dead. Powerful abbesses in the early years of Anglo-Saxon Christianity ruled over convents, which were often associated with one family, so they essentially presided over members of their own kin. These convents often recorded and collected family histories, which may have been for the benefit of adding all members of a family to a necrology. The commemoration and recollection of the dead may have been particularly associated with women in early Anglo-Saxon England. For example, Boniface's requests for prayers are mainly directed at fellow nuns. Even after the decline of female monasticism during the first Viking Age, we can still see a strong emphasis on women as instigators and guardians of memory. It is Guthlac's sister Pega who prays for him for three days and encourages the cult of the saint,¹¹¹ and the widow Oswyn in *The Life of St Edmund* is credited with the tending the body of the (dead) saint, cutting his hair and nails and keeping them as relics on the altar.¹¹² In late Anglo-Saxon England two queens, Emma and Edith, commission official lives of their menfolk. Emma's *Encomium*, which she commissioned for herself, portrays her as mourning the death of King Cnut with the natives and adds an admonition to the reader to pray daily for his soul.¹¹³ A specific female form of 'text' may have been the textiles that were fashioned or commissioned by royal ladies. The sorry state of survival of many of these artefacts may have robbed us of a uniquely female perspective on Anglo-Saxon history.¹¹⁴

Women may have been in charge of the preparation of the body for the funeral,¹¹⁵ and may have overseen the secular part of the rituals surrounding

¹⁰⁹ Romans 15: 30.

¹¹⁰ Wollasch, 'Die mittelalterliche Lebensform der Verbrüderung', 218.

¹¹¹ B. Colgrave ed. and trans., *Felix Life of St Guthlac* (Cambridge: CUP, 1956), 160.

¹¹² Skeat, *Æfric, Lives* 2, 314–35, at 328.

¹¹³ A. Campbell ed. and trans., *Encomium Emma Reginae* (Cambridge: CUP for the Royal Historical Society, 1998), 38.

¹¹⁴ Wall-hangings, altar pieces and other embroidered textiles seem to have contained recollections of historical events. The only surviving 'history' is the embroidered 'tapestry' from Bayeux.

¹¹⁵ Albeit late Anglo-Saxon depictions, such as the *Old English Hexateuch*, of the shrouding of the dead do not depict women at this task. Instead they are portrayed 'weeping'.

death. However, new rituals of commemoration meant that the funeral was not enough, and there had to be frequent and constant reminders of the dead in the lives of the living. Since much of this was performed outside the home, we do not know how much or little women were part of these rituals, but we do have indication that their role may have been the instigation and sponsorship of memory.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The creation of new forms of relations – which were extended from monastic organisations to groups of lay people, such as guilds – opened new ways of commemoration of the members of such a ‘family’.¹¹⁶ The new ‘family member’ could repay his inclusion in the group, and especially in the prayers of a monastic community, with what was known as a *convivium in refectorio*. Such a meal in honour of the dead benefactor was celebrated *in memoriam*, i.e. in his or her memory.¹¹⁷

Continental sources, such as Ekkehard of St Gall’s history of his monastery,¹¹⁸ indicate that in tenth-century monastic circles the possibility of paying for memory with a meal or feast resulted in a new system of sponsorship, the *convivio in refectorio*.¹¹⁹ Here a king, bishop or other nobleman would visit the monastery and play host to the religious congregation. In return he became one of the *fratres conscripti*, a brother in the eyes of the monastery.¹²⁰ He would be included in the *liber vitae* of the monastery and henceforward be remembered in the prayers of the community. Ekkehard describes the meal in detail and writes that during the celebrations a passage concerning charity ‘*caritas*’ from 1 Corinthians 13: 4 was read out. For this reason, the meal that connected the living and dead members was called *caritas*. The *caritas* may have been a relic of the *full*, the ‘drink to the dead’ of pagan times. Unfortunately, the clearest indication of how a funerary rite during the pagan–Christian interim period may have been conducted does not come from Old English or German literature, but from much later Old Norse depictions, where the *erfiöl*, ‘inheritance beer’, was drunk both to the heir and the deceased at the funeral.¹²¹ The cup drunk in honour of the dead person was called *full* in depictions of the pagan period, but *minni* in Christian times, which appears to be a translation of Latin *caritas*.¹²² The custom of funerary drinking is much

¹¹⁶ Oexle, ‘Mahl’, 409–10.

¹¹⁷ Oexle, ‘Mahl’, 411.

¹¹⁸ Haefele ed. and trans., *Ekkehard IV*, for example chap. 16, 42, when King Konrad becomes a *frater conscriptus*. This is done with much pomp, gifts for the monks and the monastery and a lavish meal in honour of the patron saint, St Otmar.

¹¹⁹ Oexle, ‘Mahl’, 410–12; the same author’s ‘Gegenwart der Toten’, 34–43 shows the development of necrologies in connection with the habitual meal of the dead.

¹²⁰ K. Schmid, ‘Von den *fratres conscripti* in Ekkehards St Galler Klostergeschichten’, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 25 (1991), 109–22.

¹²¹ J. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 106.

¹²² U. Schwab, ‘Blut trinken und im Bier ertrinken: Zur Trinkmetaphorik bei Saxo Grammaticus im Vergleich zu Zeugnissen der germanischen Heldendichtung, besonders des Nibelungenliedes’, in: Carlo Santini ed., *Saxo Grammaticus tra storiografia e letteratura* (Rome: Il Calamo, 1992), 367–415,

more pronounced in Old Norse texts, which are, of course, from a later period. Whether this is really a relic of pre-Christian drinking or rather influenced by Christian rituals of remembrance remains to be seen. What it does demonstrate is the continuing importance of funerary feasting even after the advent of Christianity. One example of this custom is described in Snorri Sturlusson's thirteenth-century *Heimskringla*, when King Svein Forkbeard takes on the succession of his father by moving into the high seat and drinking to his memory. Everyone who attends the ceremony had to share this *minni*:

Fyrsta dag at veizlunni áðr Sveinn konungr stigi I hásæti fœður sins, þá drakk hann minni hans [. . .] þat minni skyldu allir drekka, þeir er at erfinu váru. Þa var skenkt hœfðingjum Jómsvikinga in stærstu horn af inum sterkasta drykk, er þar var. En er þat minni var af drukkit, þa skyldi drekka Krists minni allir menn¹²³

There are no such Anglo-Saxon colourful tales of the feasting of kings, or comparative narratives from within the monastery, apart from Wulfstan of Winchester's description of a feast that King Eadred (946–955) celebrated with the somewhat reluctant monks of Abingdon.¹²⁴ Despite such lack of documentation, English kings were eager to become part of commemorative celebrations, as the bequest of King Athelstan to the Old Minster at Winchester from 934 shows. The proceeds of the lands that he gives to the minster are to *gefeormian*, 'feed' the community.¹²⁵ Athelstan is particularly renowned for the dispensation of gifts and relics to monastic foundations, both at home and abroad. These not only served to support his spiritual wellbeing, but also his political ambitions.¹²⁶

When, for example, the sisters of King Athelstan were sent to the Continent in 929 in the company of Archbishop Coenwald, they inscribed themselves, other members of the royal family and a number of bishops in the *liber vitae* of Reichenau.¹²⁷ German sources have recorded the generosity with which Coenwald treated the monasteries they visited.¹²⁸ Reichenau has not only one of the most impressive *liber vitae* – 40,000 names were to be recorded over time –

at 392–3. *Minni* in Old High German is the direct translation of *caritas*, which in the monastic context meant a drink that was drunk in memory to a person during a *convivium*. The eighth-century *Vita Haimrami* condemns the Bavarians, who, despite the efforts of the missionaries, drink from one cup to their sons and to demons; Hauck, 'Rituelle Speisegemeinschaft', 612.

¹²³ 'On the first day of the feast, before King Svein stepped into the high seat of his father, he drunk in memory of him [. . .] and this memory drink had to be drunk by all that were at the feast. Then the Jomsvikings were served with the biggest horns and the strongest drink that was there. And when the memory drink was drunk up, then all men had to drink to Christ's memory.' The story continues that they afterwards drank to the memory of St Michael and Earl Sigvaldr's father; F. Jónsson ed., *Heimskringla: Noregs konunga sögur af Snorri Sturlusson*, 4 vols (Copenhagen: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1893–1900) 1, chap. 35, 321–2.

¹²⁴ M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom eds. and trans., *Wulfstan of Winchester: The Life of St Aethelwold* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 22–4, see below p. 131.

¹²⁵ BL, Add. 15350, fol. 93; Robertson ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 48–51.

¹²⁶ M. Wood, 'The making of King Aethelstan's empire: an English Charlemagne?', in: P. Wormald with D. Bullough and R. Collins eds., *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 250–72.

¹²⁷ G. Althoff, *Amicitiae und Pacta: Bündnis, Einigung, Politik und Gebetsdenken im beginnenden 10. Jahrhundert* (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1992), 125–7.

¹²⁸ Althoff, *Amicitia und Pacta*, 126–7. See also: C. Lee, 'Eclectic memories: in search of Eadgyth', *Offa* 58/59 (2003), 277–85.

but also held one of the most impressive collection of 'afterlife visions', including Gregory's *Dialogues*, the early ninth-century metrical *Visio Wettini* by Walahfrid Strabo, as well as Haimon's prose version, Boniface's version of the anonymous vision of a monk at Wenlock, the seventh-century vision of the Irish monk Fursey, as well as Bede's vision of Dryhthelm.¹²⁹ It is clear that caring for the dead was serious business at Reichenau, and it is not surprising that King Athelstan liked to connect himself with this rich seam of remembrance.

Unfortunately, little is known about Athelstan's private life, but if his concerns were about increasing the care for the souls of the royal house, this was accomplished under his successor Edgar. The Benedictine Reform replaced individual arrangements with a coherent and compulsory framework of care. The *Regularis Concordia*, by St Æthelwold, which is based on the Benedictine Office, was written around 970 to unify practices at English monasteries. Here it is demanded of monks that on Saturdays they should perform the '*caritas*'.¹³⁰ Before that the monks will sing five psalms for the dead and remember the king, queen and benefactors in the litany.¹³¹ Afterwards the community assembles with thanksgiving to draw the measure of drink with which it enters the refectory for the *caritas*.¹³²

The term *caritas* translates as 'charity' or 'love', and is used by biblical writers, such as Paul, to denote the care that should be extended by Christians to one another.¹³³ It appears that in early medieval monastic contexts, *caritas* denotes primarily intercession and commemoration, which was accompanied by a drink. One important point of the *caritas* celebrations is that they are generally sponsored. In England, as well as in Continental sources, kings and queens appear as sponsors and benefactors, and were remembered in such celebrations.¹³⁴

There is, however, still considerable uncertainty about whether the *caritas* and the *convivium in refectorio* in Anglo-Saxon monasteries were part of one celebration or were two separate events. The *caritas* celebration seems to have had its roots in pagan commemorative ceremonies, as well as in the Christian rituals, and was called *minne* or *minni* in Germanic languages. Equally, the terminology used by various scholars in connection with rituals of remembrance is highly confusing. While the *caritas* and *convivium in refectorio* are definitely linked to food and drink, the case is less clear-cut with *memoria*, where the term seems to denote various concepts of commemoration. There does not seem to be a mention of *memoria* in medieval texts, but many acts are performed *in memoriam* and

¹²⁹ Angenendt, 'Theologie und Liturgie', 96.

¹³⁰ Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, 21–2.

¹³¹ Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, 21–2. Athelstan's lawcode at Exeter does not mention *caritas*, but demands that all clerics should sing 50 psalms each Friday for the king and all who support him; Liebermann, *Gesetze I*, 168–9.

¹³² Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, 22–3, the need for monks to pray for the living and the dead had already been part of Benedict of Aniane counsel; Constable, 'Commemoration of the dead', 188.

¹³³ 1 Corinthians 13: 1–8.

¹³⁴ Hauck, 'Rituelle Speisegemeinschaft'. It appears that the *caritas* on the Continent was celebrated with a substantial meal, but that in contrast to Anglo-Saxon customs it was only celebrated on certain days of the year, mainly on the feast of St Andrew and the Feast of St John the Baptist; Hauck, 'Speisegemeinschaft', 617.

there is some early Christian evidence for ritualised remembrance. In his *De civitate Dei*, Augustine calls the pagan commemoration of the dead *memorias*,¹³⁵ but he uses the same word for the shrines of the saints.¹³⁶ Clerics, such as Alcuin, talk about the obligation to pray for the commemoration of all gathered around the altar, the living and the dead.¹³⁷

Not only were monastic communities 'paid' to remember the name of a sponsor, but patrons aimed to involve as many other groups as possible to guarantee that their memory would not be forgotten. One of these groups was the poor. Most of the meals for the dead from late Antiquity onwards included an 'invitation' to the poor.¹³⁸ The precedent for this custom was, of course, biblical and stems from Christ's command to ask the poor and crippled to the feast.¹³⁹ The nature of sustenance provided by the dead changed during the course of the early Middle Ages, when almsgiving replaced the funerary feasting. After the eighth century, when the commemoration rites of the Christian Church had become standardised in Western Europe, caring for the dead is synonymous with donations for the souls, and a particular importance is given to almsgiving. It is possible to imagine that food that was previously consumed by the members of the funerary party would have now been given to the poor as well, since the feeding of the poor had a key place in the memorial celebrations of the Middle Ages.¹⁴⁰ The inclusion of paupers also increased the group of people who were indebted by what we might call the 'hospitality of the deceased'. Such indebtedness was an important aspect of memory. Since much of this memory is still in the minds of those who have benefited from the largesse of the dead, the 'scene-setting' of funerary displays has not completely vanished.

Nevertheless, whatever lavish 'scene-setting' may have been performed in pre-Christian cemeteries, this was now superseded by Christian rituals. The grave continues to be a focal point, but the eye is now led from the spectacle of the burial, which may have been completed with the interment of the corpse, to an ongoing display of death: either through elaborate grave markers, or through the naming of the dead in the liturgy. Gifts from the dead pay for commemoration. The significance of such payments and the circle of obligation permeates other areas of Anglo-Saxon culture as well.

¹³⁵ Dombart and Kalb eds., *Sancti Aurelii Augustini: De Civitate Dei*, 248.

¹³⁶ Constable, 'Commemoration of the dead', 176, with reference to *De pro cura*, 658.

¹³⁷ Wollasch, 'Verbrüderung', 215.

¹³⁸ Oexle, 'Mahl', 406.

¹³⁹ Luke 14: 12–14.

¹⁴⁰ Oexle, 'Mahl', 403–6.

Feasting Between the Margins

OTHER THAN religious obligations, such as masses and prayers, there is scant information how the Anglo-Saxons mourned their dead. After the Conversion most information on death rituals comes via text sources, which are highly selective and eclectic in what they choose to transmit. The funeral of Edgar, for example, is described in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, but his wake or a funeral feast is not. The eleventh-century illustrated *Hexateuch* (BL, Cotton Claudius B.iv) shows the death of several biblical figures, their shrouding and the sadness of their relatives, but no feast or burial rite. The depiction of common practice, unfortunately, is not the prime objective of literature, and only in exceptional circumstances was unusual or undesirable behaviour recorded. While the religious part of funerals and the commemoration of the soul may have become standardised during the ninth century, there is no accounting for the secular part of the ritual. That it must have continued is evident from glimpses of such customs as can be snatched from written sources by disgruntled churchmen. Regardless of injunctions and criticism by the clergy, it seems that part of the funerary rite still included some form of drinking. Continental sources in particular, such as the early eleventh-century Burchard of Worms, reprimand ‘dancing, wearing masks, singing and drinking in the graveyard’.¹ The sixth-century *capitula* of the Frankish king Childebert had already forbidden nightly wakes for the dead, which seem to have been celebrated with drinking, chanting and dancing,² but the same was advised for Christmas and Easter as well. The tenth-century cleric, Regino of Prüm, was especially exasperated by *carmina diabolica*, ‘devilish songs’ sung in the churchyards.³ While there is no indication of such excesses in Anglo-Saxon sources, it seems from the rebuttal by Ælfric in the *Life of St Swithin* that heavy drinking was still a part of wakes in tenth-century England:

Sume menn eac drincað æt deadra manna lice
ofer ealle þa niht swiðe unrihtlice
and gremiað god mid heora gegaf-spræce
þonne man gebeorscipe ne gebyrað æt lice
ac halige gebedu þær gebyriað swiþor.⁴

¹ *Opera Omnia*, PL 115 (1880), 838.

² Boretius ed., *Capitularia Regum Francorum I*, MGH Leges II: 1, 2–3.

³ Kyll, *Tod*, 33–5. For Burchard’s view on wakes, see also Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, 648, and *Opera Omnia*, PL 115, 723. In England the *Canons of Edgar* forbid the singing of ‘heathen songs’ and ‘devil’s games’ on feast days, Fowler, chap. 27, 67.

⁴ ‘Some men likewise most unlawfully drink the whole night at the wake for the corpse and anger God

Ælfric, admittedly, is a lone voice,⁵ but these few lines show that, at least for some of the laity, feasting was still part of funerary rites, and that perhaps invitations were extended to the clergy as well.

The injunctions against funerary feasting are all relatively late. This may be explained by the lack of interest during the seventh and eighth centuries in the burial place, when the work of the priest may have been done with the *translation* of the body to the grave.⁶ It should be assumed that eating, drinking or even dancing may not have been allowed in consecrated ground even during the earlier period, so perhaps the secular part of the ceremony took part in the house of the bereaved, which is what Ælfric seems to be referring to. That some form of ritual involving food and drink must have taken place in Northern Europe is evident from documents such as Gregory III's response to Boniface (732) on how to handle sacrifices for the dead, which follows a passage in which the pope demands that the missionary should undermine the eating of horsemeat:

Pro obeuntibus quippe concludisse dinosceris, si liceat oblations offere. Sancta sic tenet ecclesia, ut quisque pro suis mortuis vere christianis offerat oblations atque presbiter eorum faciat memoriam Et quamvis omnes peccatis subiaceamus, congruit, ut sacerdos pro mortuis catholicis memoriam faciat et intercedat, no tamen pro impiis, quamvis christiani fuerint, tale quid agere licebit.⁷

The injunctions of clerics suggest that feasts survived in the ritual of the vigil, but this was a private affair, celebrated in the house of the deceased, and is therefore difficult to source. Instead of *sacrificia mortuorum* in or around the grave, people were now encouraged to provide for the soul, resting until the resurrection in an intermediate place, from where it needed assistance from the living. Since confession and penance was a fixed part of the Christian death rituals,⁸ lavish feasting would have been wholly inappropriate. Instead of food and drink funeral parties were advised not to consume sustenance and fast in order to atone for the sins of the dead. The *Penitential of Theodore*, for example, demands that the neighbours of a dead penitent ought to fast for seven days and make an offering on the altar.⁹

Fasting was, of course, not only connected to death rituals, but it was regarded as a standard atonement for sin. Since, according to Christian theology, sin entered the world through Eve's transgression, which was to eat from the tree that was explicitly forbidden through God's command, not eating was seen as an

with their wanton speech; it is not seemly for man to have a feast at the wake, but holy prayers are rather seemly here'; Skeat, *Ælfric, Lives* 1, 460, ll. 313–17.

⁵ In a letter to Wulfsig of Sherborne, he warns priests against taking part in *hæðenscype*, which he defines as 'eating and drinking, as well as singing and laughing', which are part of funerary rites; B. Fehr ed., *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics*, Bibliothek angelsächsischer Prosa 9 (Hamburg, 1914), 267.

⁶ B. Effros, *Creating a Community*, 73; for funeral services, see Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, passim.

⁷ Rau, *Briefe des Bonifatius*, 100; 'You have asked about the departed, whether sacrifices can be offered on their behalf. The Holy Church holds it like this that all bring sacrifices for their dead, if they have been true Christians, and that the priest remembers them. Despite the fact that we are all sinners, it is proper that the priest only remembers the Catholic dead and prays for their intercession, but not for the non-pious, even if they are Christian, he is not allowed to do so.'

⁸ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 205. For Anglo-Saxon evidence, see *Canons of Edgar*, chap. 68, 14–17.

⁹ Wasserscheleben, *Bussordnungen*, 207.

appropriate means of atonement. The fact that eating food was at the root of all evil (and human mortality) was used by Ælfric in his second homily on the Litanies to remind his audience that they could use no shortcuts on their path to forgiveness:

Oft unmen secgað þæt hi unsynnige beon. ðeah ðe hi leotlice mettas him on muð bestingon on swilcum fæstendagum mid fræcere gyferynse and nellað understandan hu adam us forpærde ðurh anes æpples ðigene þe he æt forboden; Nis nan man fæstende þe underfehð mid muðe æniges gesceaftes sæ oþþe eorðan ac ða beoð scyldige ðe ða gesetnysse tobrecað þære halgan gelaðunge mid unalyfedre ðigene and fyllað heora wambe fracodlice ær timan.¹⁰

For the majority of Anglo-Saxons, fasting would mean abstention from certain foods, such as meat or alcohol, during Lent, Rogationweek¹¹ and Advent, or simply not eating outside prescribed mealtimes. In the *Penitential of Theodore* there is already a clear distinction between mere abstention from certain foods and true fasting. This differentiates between abstaining from meat and wine on the one hand, and from fasting on the other.¹² Those who could not or would not adhere to prescribed fasts from a very early period onwards could replace them through acts of charity, such as almsgiving and prayer.

The earliest Christian communities did not have a regulated framework for fasting. The amount of fasting was left to the individual member.¹³ Only when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the third century were rules for fasting laid down by the Church authorities. The understanding was that the conversion of ethnically diverse people needed a religious framework, and prescribed fasting periods would unite Christians throughout the world, in the same way that high feasts were celebrated by all adherents. While the early Christian communities were merely advised to moderate their food intake at banquets,¹⁴ a twice-weekly partial abstinence from foods such as meat and animal produce was soon introduced as standard.¹⁵ Generally Fridays and Saturdays were regarded as fast days, since Friday was the day of Christ's crucifixion and Saturdays from the third century onwards were regarded as extensions of the Friday abstinence. Alternatively, fasts were observed by some communities on Wednesdays. The edicts of the Council of Nicaea in 325 contain the first mention of Lent, and from the fourth century onwards Christians were supposed to fast forty days prior to Easter, an injunction based on the example of Christ's fast in

¹⁰ M. Godden, *Ælfric: Catholic Homilies, The Second Series*, EETS SS 5 (London: OUP, 1979), 'Feria secunda letania maiore', 189, ll. 290–8:

'Often wicked men say that they are without sin, although they push food lightly into their mouths with shameful greed on such fast days and they do not understand that Adam ruined us through the eating of one apple, that he ate forbidden. This is no fasting man, that receives in his mouth any creatures of the sea or the earth, but is guilty of breaking the holy invitation through unlawful eating and fill their bellies unashamedly before time.'

¹¹ Rogationweek or 'rogationtide', was particularly celebrated in England. This time of prayer and fasting took place three days before Ascension Day.

¹² Wassersleben, *Bussordnungen*, 198.

¹³ W. Vandereycken and R. van Deth, *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls: the history of self-starvation* (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 19.

¹⁴ McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 69.

¹⁵ Vandereycken and van Deth, *From Fasting Saints*, 19.

the desert.¹⁶ Soon after, a forty-day period before both Christmas and Pentecost was added, plus some fast days before feast days such as Ascension Day, or the Ember Days, which marked the beginning of each season. Thus, by the sixth century, fasting periods extended over no less than a third of the year.¹⁷

The amount of food that could be consumed in one meal was never explicitly laid out, but by the tenth century it was customary to eat only one meal a day on a fast day, which was usually taken at mid-afternoon. It seems that in England throughout the Anglo-Saxon period Sundays were exempt from fasting, because they were regarded as holy days.¹⁸ In the *Penitential of Theodore*, the penance for fasting on a Sunday, if done out of negligence, is a twenty-day fast, but if it is done out of contempt, the person shall be 'abhorred as a Jew' by the Church.¹⁹ Ecclesiastical sources, such as homiletic writings, as, for example, the tenth-century *Vercelli Homilies* and the homilies by Ælfric, name certain fast periods, such as Ash Wednesday and Lent or Rogationtide, which were to be observed by all. One of the most comprehensive lists of late Anglo-Saxon fast days is found in the Old English poem *The Seasons for Fasting*.²⁰ The fragmentary poem opens with an account of the Mosaic laws (which include the fasts observed by the Hebrews) and then lists the English fasting periods, which are the Ember feasts, Lent, a week after Pentecost, a week before the autumn equinox and a week before Christmas. Fasting outside of these prescribed frameworks served two purposes, one to compensate for sin, the other to garner extra favours as a sacrifice made for God in the hope that he will reward such a gift. Since the giving of actual sacrifices, such as the slaughtering of animals, is no longer possible for Christians, offers can only be made in a circumspect way. Since God had made the world for mankind, he was therefore quintessentially responsible for providing food for men. If such gifts were voluntarily not taken at a certain time, or taken sparingly, as a form of sacrifice, this might persuade the deliverance of even more abundant gifts at another time. It seems that some fast days were introduced with exactly this intention: the *Old English Martyrology* describes how in honour of the martyrdom of Pope Callistus (Calixtus) three fast days were introduced to the year, one for abundant wheat, the other for abundant wine and the last for abundant oil.²¹ Only few fasts are communal experiences in Anglo-Saxon England, such as Rogationweek, which appears to have been celebrated with processions.

Fasting as a result of an imposed penitence no longer refers to the general atonement for the transgressions of mankind, but is an individually prescribed punishment for sin. Such penitence is meant to single out and embarrass the culprit. Children and the infirm were exempt from fasting, and from the fourth

¹⁶ Vandereycken and van Deth, *From Fasting Saints*, 19; see also Matthew 4: 2.

¹⁷ Vandereycken and van Deth, *From Fasting Saints*, 20.

¹⁸ Skeat, *Ælfric, Lives*, 1, *Ash Wednesday*, 260, ll. 3–6.

¹⁹ Wassersleben, *Bussordnung*, chap. 11, 195.

²⁰ *ASPR* VI, 98–104.

²¹ Kotzor, *Martyrologium*, 229.

century onwards adults had the opportunity to buy an indulgence or exemption, which permitted them to consume otherwise forbidden foods during a fast.²² In the Anglo-Saxon period, almsgiving could replace fasting as a form of penance issued for transgression. *Vercelli Homily* 20 explains that fasting and almsgiving are 'heavenly work' and constitute the door to the heavenly kingdom, through which all earthly predicaments will be overcome.²³ Moreover, Wulfstan explicitly exempts those who are unable to adhere to a fast in the homily *In Cena Domini*: *And gyf ge ne magon fæstan, ge magon huru don ælmissan seo alyse eowre sawla of helle*, 'and those of you that cannot fast may give alms to redeem your souls from hell'.²⁴ By late Anglo-Saxon England fasting alone is no longer enough to atone for sins: it should now be complemented by the giving of alms.²⁵ Since the dead can no longer atone for sins, they are dependent on the network of relations who will do this in their stead. Almsgiving and provision are extensions of feeding those who are socially inferior and in the eyes of the Church preferential to any other form of secular funerary feasting.

PAYING FOR MEAD

One of the most prominent occasions of feasting is depicted on the Bayeux Tapestry.²⁶ Bishop Odo and William of Normandy are shown at the table with some of their retinue. The image of this feast is possibly derived from the sixth-century manuscript illumination of the *Augustine Gospel*, and the description of the figures seems to be derived from the *Vita* of Odo by William of Poitiers. This feast depicted in the embroidery is not a secular event, but the celebration of the Eucharist. Martha Rampton has claimed that this feast occurs in the wrong place, since it is depicted *before* the battle.²⁷ The *sacramentum* that is depicted in this scene has two meanings: one, to legitimise what is to come, and secondly, to reinforce the obligations connected with such feasting.²⁸ This is different from acts of celebrating the *memoria*, which, as described before, could also be anticipated in a communal meal *ante mortem*. The scene depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry appropriates religious symbolism in order to legitimise secular power in a ceremony that has great symbolic significance. Since this is the eve of a battle in which some of the participants may die, the giving of the Eucharist is essentially a *viaticum*.

²² Vandereycken and van Deth, *From Fasting Saints*, 20.

²³ D. Scragg ed., *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS OS 300 (Oxford: OUP, 1992), 334, ll. 35–42.

²⁴ Bethurum, *Homilies of Wulfstan*, 372, ll. 100–2.

²⁵ Lynne Grundy has stressed the importance Ælfric lays on almsgiving, which is seen as an act of positive penitence; *Books and Grace: Ælfric's theology*, KCLMS 6 (London: Centre of Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1991), 200–9.

²⁶ Strictly speaking, this is not Anglo-Saxon, but the embroidery was most likely made at Canterbury in England shortly after the Norman Conquest.

²⁷ M. Rampton, 'The significance of the banquet scene in the *Bayeux Tapestry*', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, NS 21 (1994), 33–53, at 38.

²⁸ Rampton, 'Significance', 42.

The second feast depicted on the embroidery shows Harold Godwinson and his retinue in the upper part of a building. The caption identifies the place as Bosham, and thus this is a feast celebrated by Harold before he sets out on his ill-fated journey to the court of William of Normandy. Feasting in literature and art is frequently a symbolic act, which is used to underline the bonds between various groups. The feast in Old English literature is the place where loyalty is rewarded and gifts are exchanged. Harold is uniting and bonding with his men before they set out into the unknown. The outcome of the mission would have possibly been well-known to those who looked at the tapestry, so this feast is poignant: on his way to Normandy Harold will encounter numerous adverse circumstances, which will eventually force him to swear an oath to William through which he forfeits his claim to the throne. The feast scene is the last time that Harold is fully in charge of events in the Bayeux Tapestry; it is a turning point, which will lead to his eventual death. It is not only a significant event in the narration of events, but it is also a pre-empted funerary feast, since the men feasted by Harold in the image will die with him and ‘repay’ their mead on the battlefield of Hastings.

In the same way as the depiction of Odo and William in the Bayeux Tapestry seeks to legitimise their actions, Anglo-Saxon kings seem to have sought spiritual assistance at feasting to endorse their political endeavours. One example is the feast at Abingdon, which King Eadred shares with Archbishop Æthelwold:

Venit ergo rex quadam die ad monasterium [. . .] rogauitque eum abbas in hospicio cum suis prandere. Annuit rex ilico; et contigit adesse sibi non paucos optimatum suorum uenientes ex gente Northanhimbrorum, qui omnes cum rege adierunt conuiuium. Laetatusque est rex, et iussit abunde propinare hospitibus ydromellum, clausis diligenter foribus ne quis fugiendo potationem regalis coniuuii deserere uideretur. Quid multa? Hauserunt ministri liquorem tota die ad omnem sufficientiam conuiuiantibus; sed nequiuit ipse liquor exhauriri de uase, nisi ad mensuram palmi, inebriatis suatim Northanimbris et uespericum laetitia recedentibus.²⁹

This scene elucidates the complex relations between the feaster and the feasted. The Northumbrians described in this passage had long enjoyed a rule independent from the House of Wessex, and this occasion was obviously an opportunity to forge bonds in a special place. The king, who is certainly a benefactor of the monastery, is portrayed as showing much interest in his house, so that he even supervises the building work himself. The abbot shows him the customary

²⁹ Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Wulfstan of Winchester: Life of St Aethelwold*, 22–4; ‘One day the king visited the monastery [. . .]. Then the abbot invited him to dine with his people in the hospice. The king was quick to accept. Now it chanced that he had with him not a few of his Northumbrian thegns, and they all accompanied him to the party. The king was delighted and ordered the guests to be served with lavish draughts of mead. The doors were carefully secured to make sure that no one should get out and be seen leaving the royal carousal. Well, the servants drew off drink all day to the hearts’ content of the diners, but the level in the container should not be reduced below a palm’s measure. The Northumbrians became drunk, as they tend to, and very cheerful they were when they left at evening’, trans. Lapidge and Winterbottom.

The inclusion of the Northumbrian thegns, who are appeased with the bountiful liquor, has special poignancy if one considers that Eadred spent his reign trying to incorporate Northumbria into the realm.

hospitality, but it is the king who is in command. He is the one who orders the doors to be closed, so that no one can escape or abstain from this meeting, which will have renewed the bonds of community. The miraculous bounty of the beverage signifies that this feast pleases God, albeit that neither the king nor the monks seem to make use of this plentiful gift. The remark of the customary drunkenness of the Northumbrians is surely intended as a deliberate slur. Essentially this feast is meant to cement the two parties under the auspices of the Church. The importance with which Anglo-Saxon writers treated this episode can be gathered from the fact that Ælfric recounts the story in his abridged version of the *Vita*.³⁰

In all three examples feasting is an important aspect of the relations between the different parties. It is an appropriate means of uniting very different groups of people, and the addition of solemn rituals will have certainly helped to tighten the bond. The examples from the Bayeux Tapestry, however, both portray a feast that is celebrated before an important event, and it seems that such ‘pre-emptive feasting’ occurs in other sources as well.

Retainers will have enjoyed the hospitality of their lords before they were required to fulfil their duties and there are a number of occasions where warriors are reminded to ‘repay’ their lord’s largesse through service, as for example in *Beowulf*:

Ic ðæt mæl geman, þær we medu þegun,
þonne we geheton ussum hlaforde
in bior-sele, ðe us ðas beagas geaf,
þæt we him ða guð-getawa gyldan woldon,
gif him þyslicu þearf gelumpe,
helmas ond heard sweord (ll. 2633–68a)³¹

or *The Battle of Maldon*:

Gemunap þa mæla þe we oft æt meodo spræcon,
þonne we on bence beot ahofon,
hæleð on healle, ymbe heard gewinn (ll. 212–14)³²

The first example is a reminder to repay Beowulf’s generosity, who at this point is making ready for the dragon fight, and the second an exhortation to the defeated Anglo-Saxons to continue fight in the light of adversity. In both cases the outcome is presumed to be lethal. Whereas in these cases the retainers have to be reminded that they have already received their ‘payment’ as a way of urging them into action, Hnæf’s young retainers in the *Finnsburh Fragment* are praised for readily repaying the mead they have received from his hands:

³⁰ Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Ælfric’s Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, in: *Wulfstan of Winchester: Life of St Aethelwold*, 73.

³¹ ‘I remember the time when, as we drank mead there in the beer-hall, we would promise our lord, who gave us these treasures, that we would repay him for these battle accoutrements, the helmets and the tough swords, if a need such as this should befall him’; trans. Bradley, 480.

³² ‘Let us call to mind those declarations we often uttered over mead, when from our seat we heroes in hall would put up pledges about tough fighting’; trans. Bradley, 525.

Feasting Between the Margins

Ne gefrægn ic næfre wurplicor æt wera hilde
sixtig sige-beorna, sel gebæran,
ne nefre swanas hwitne medo sel forgyldan,
ðonne Hnæfe guldan his hæg-stealdas (ll. 37–40)³³

The concept of paying for mead does not only occur in Old English literature, but also in Old Welsh poetry. Jenny Rowlands has compared the Old English evidence to *Y Gododdin*,³⁴ which recalls how the Welsh warriors feast together on mead for a year, before they set out to fight at Catraeth;

Gwyr a grysiasant, buant gynaid,
Hoedlfyrion, meddwon uch medd hidlaid,
Gosgordd Fynyddog, enwog yn rhaid,
Gwerth eu gwledd o fedd fu eu henaid³⁵

Y Gododdin, which is transmitted via a thirteenth-century manuscript, but possibly set in sixth-century Britain, refers on a number of occasions to this mead as being ‘bitter’. The bitterness is transfigurative, since the sweet drink has been paid for with bitter death. Anglo-Saxon literature as well knows the motif of ‘bitter drink’, as evident from a passage in the Old English *Guthlac* poem, where Eve serves ‘bitter drink’ to Adam, instead of the biblical apple:

Nænig monna wæs
of þam sigetudre siþþan æfre
Godes willan þæs georn ne gynnwisde
þæt he bibugan mæge þone bitran drync
þone Eue fyrm Adame geaf,
byrlade bryd geong: þæt him bam gescód
in þam deoran hám. (*Guthlac B*, ll. 865b–71a)³⁶

This precious home referred to, is of course, paradise, which is forfeited as a result of this ‘drinking’. A further passage from *Guthlac B* elaborates on the inevitability of death for even the most holy man, such as Guthlac, as a result of this ‘bitter sorrow-brew’ that Eve made at the beginning of time:

. . . bryþen wæs ongunnen
þætte Adame . . . Eue gebyrmd
æt fruman worulde. Feond byrlade
ærest þære idese ȝ heo Adame,
hyre swæsum were, siþþan scencte
bittor bædeweg þæs þa byre siþþan

³³ ‘Never have I heard of sixty victors in a battle between men behaving more nobly and more worthily, and never of youths better repaying shining mead than his young warriors repaid Hnæf’; trans. Bradley, 509.

³⁴ J. Rowland, ‘OE *Ealuscserwen/Meoduscserwen* and the concept of “Paying for Mead”’, *Leeds Studies in English*, NS 21 (1990), 1–12.

³⁵ ‘Warriors charged, leaping forward together, /short-lives, drunk over the clarified mead,/The retinue of Mynyddog,/ renowned in battle,/ They paid for their mead-feast with their lives’; trans. Jarman; A. Jarman ed. and trans., *Aneirin, Y Gododdin: Britain’s oldest heroic poem* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1988), 24, stanza 340.

³⁶ ‘Ever afterwards, there was no man from that distinguished stock so zealous in the will of God or so amply instructed that he may avoid the bitter drink which Eve the young bride gave and served up to Adam of old: it harmed them both within that precious home’; trans. Bradley, 271; J. Roberts ed., *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979), 109.

Feasting the Dead

grimme onguldon gafulrædenne
þurh ærgewyrht þætte ænig ne wæs
fyrn cynnes from fruman siððan,
mon on moldan, þætte meahte him
gebeorgan 7 bibugan þone bleatan drync
deopan deaðweges ac him duru sylfa
on þa sliðnan tid sona ontyneð,
ingong geopenað; (Guthlac B, ll. 980b–93a)³⁷

The serving of a ‘bitter’ drink is an inversion of the ‘paying for mead’ imagery, but it may also be rooted in the motif of the ‘cup of death’, *poculum mortis*, which refers to the cup of Christ’s passion (Mark 14: 36; Luke 22: 42). Carleton Brown assumes that the hymn *Rex aeternae Domine*, which is found with an Old English interlinear gloss in an eleventh-century hymnary (Durham, Chapter Library Ms B ii.32), is the most likely source for the *poculum mortis* motif for Anglo-Saxon writers and subsequent uses of the image of the death-bringing cup.³⁸ While the manuscript evidence here is quite late to be regarded as the source, Brown argues that this hymn was already known to Bede, since he pays tribute to it in his treatise *De Metris*.³⁹ The oldest extant version of the hymn survives in a Benedictine Psalter (Cotton Vespasian A.i), written at the beginning of the eighth century, but the passage concerning ‘serving death in a cup’ is missing from it. In the Durham hymn the devil is portrayed as the deceiver of humans, handing out death in a cup to mankind.⁴⁰ This line, however, appears only in two of the extant versions from the approximate forty surviving examples of this hymn.⁴¹ One of the manuscripts in which these lines are included was produced at St Gall in the eighth century (Codex Sangallense 2), which had some well-established connections to Anglo-Saxon monasteries.

Brown argues that the devil as *agent provocateur* also occurs in the Old English adaptation of the poem *Juliana*, which is not found in the source for this text, the Latin *Vita*. Here the Anti-Christ prides himself on having served strife to those in the wine-hall, so that they lose their lives by the sword.⁴² Despite the

³⁷ ‘The brew was in the making which Eve fermented for Adam at the world’s beginning. First the fiend served it to the woman and she then poured the bitter cup for Adam, her dear husband. From that time onwards, because of that ancient transgression, the children have painfully paid the forfeit, so that there has been not one of the human race, not a man on earth from the beginning onwards, that has been able to escape and avoid that grievous drink from the deep cup of death, but the door into that hard time soon opens itself to them and reveals the way in’; trans. Bradley, 273–4; Roberts, *Guthlac*, 112–13.

³⁸ C. Brown, ‘*Poculum mortis* in Old English’, *Speculum* 15 (1940), 389–99, at 390–1.

³⁹ Brown, ‘*Poculum mortis*’, 390–1.

⁴⁰ Brown compares the Durham version with the Vespasian A.C. Ms, and this is the interpolation found in the Durham manuscript:

Quem diabolus deceperat
Hostis humani generis
Per pomum ligni vetiti
Mortis propinans poculum . . .

‘whom the Devil deceived, the enemy of the human race, through the apple of the tree, death approached in a cup’, 391.

⁴¹ Brown, ‘*Poculum mortis*’, 392.

⁴² *ASPR* 3, 126, ll. 486b–90a:

. . . Ic him byrlade
wrohte on wege, þæt he in winsele

Christian tone of his evidence Brown assumes that there may have been a pre-Christian idea of life- or death-bringing waters inherent in the figure of the deadly drink, but is unable to locate a source for it.⁴³

Hugh Magennis claims that the *poculum mortis* motif is used by Bede in the *Life of St Cuthbert*.⁴⁴ This passage plays on the difference between the cup of death and the life-bringing waters that saints can offer to the mortally ill: the saint, while on circuit through his diocese, comes to the house of one of his parishioners, whose wife is severely sick. St Cuthbert blesses some water and pours it into the mouth of the woman, who immediately is healed of her disease, and to continue the theme of drinking, offers a cup of refreshment in return: . . . *pulchroque spectaculo ipsa prima detota tanti uiri familia episcopo potum refectionis obtulit, quae per ipsius benedictionem poculum mortis euasit* . . .⁴⁵ The background of the cup, according to Magennis, has to be seen within the Germanic hall, but alongside a rich seam of cup and drink imagery derived from biblical and patristic sources. In the Old Testament wine represents good things enjoyed by men and is the mark of God's favour. In the New Testament again, Magennis argues, that wine is more of a blessing than a curse. Those who have forgone God's favour have to taste his vengeance as the bitter cup of His anger. Christ willingly undergoes his passion, but usually there is no willingness in those who have to taste the cup of God's wrath.

In the Old English poem *The Phoenix* the Fall of Man is not a 'bitter drink', but a 'bitter feast', a *sarlic symbel*, 'a sorely feast', for their sons and daughters. The poet combines the idea of the unlawful feast with the outcome of bitter misery:

. . . þær him niþ gescod,
ealdfeondes æfest, se him æt gebead,
beames blede, þæt hi bu þegun
æpple unrædum ofer est godes,
byrgdon forbodene. þær him bitter wearð
yrmþu æfter æte ond hyra eaferum swa,
sarlic symbel sunum ond dohtrum. (ll. 401b–6)⁴⁶

It is clear that it is not the feast that is wrong in itself, but that it is a feast based on disobedience.

The idea of a death-bringing feast is developed even further in *Beowulf* and

þurh swordgripe sawle forletan
of flæschoman fæge scyndan,
sarum gesoht

'I have served them strife from out of the goblet, so that by resorting to swords within the wine hall, being stricken with wounds, they released their souls'; trans. Bradley, 314.

⁴³ Brown, 'Poculum mortis', 399.

⁴⁴ H. Magennis, 'The cup as symbol and metaphor in Old English literature', *Speculum* 60 (1985), 517–36, at 523; Magennis, *Anglo-Saxon Appetites*, 130–7.

⁴⁵ Colgrave ed. and trans., *Two Lives of St Cuthbert*, 252–5; 'and it was a fair sight to see how she who had escaped the cup of death by the bishop's blessing, was the first of all the household of so great a man to offer him the cup of refreshment'; trans. Colgrave.

⁴⁶ *ASPR* 3, 105; 'There envy injured them, the spite of the old enemy who proffered them food, the fruit of the tree, so that foolishly they both partook of the apple against the permission of God and tasted the forbidden fruit. Bitter was the misery upon them there and upon their children too after the eating – a feast hurtful to their sons and daughters'; trans. Bradley, 294, with feast emending 'meal'.

Feasting the Dead

Andreas. The latter is an anonymous Old English poem recounting the life of St Andrew, and is loosely based on a lost version of the Latin apocryphal *Acta Andreae apud Anthrophagos*. The only extant version of the text is preserved in the mid-tenth-century *Vercelli Book* (Vercelli, Biblioteca capitolare CXVII). *Andreas* builds on a dichotomy between the ‘good retainer’, St Andrew, who will follow his Lord, even though it may lead to his death, and the cannibal race of the Mermedonians, who not only lack morals, but also a basic social structure. St Andrew is to punish the man-eaters in order to save Matthew from entering the food chain and also to convert them to Christianity. This serving of mead kills the heathen Mermedonians:

Meoduscweren wearð
æfter symbeldæge; slæpe tobrugdon
searuhæb[b]ende. Sund grunde onfeng,
deope gedrefed; duguð wearð afyrhted
þurh þæs flodes fær. Fæge swulton
geonge on geofone guðræs fornam
þurh sealtes swe[ll]g; þæt wæs sorgbyrþen,
biter beorþegu. Byrlas ne gældon,
ombehtþegnas; þær wæs ælcum genog
fram dæges orde drync sona gearu.⁴⁷ (*Andreas*, ll. 1526b–35)

The poem uses an inversion of the communal drinking motif, which is used in other heroic texts, such as *Beowulf*. The Mermedonians, as well as other retainers, receive ‘mead-serving’ as the ‘reward’ for their wickedness, but this mead is lethal. The beverage is also described as a *sorgbyrþen*, ‘sorrow-brew’ and *biter beorþegu*, ‘bitter beer-drinking’, which, of course is reminiscent of the deadly drink that Eve serves to Adam and which leads to their destruction.

Drinking is used as a skilful motif in the *Andreas* poem. Drinking is usually performed in the hall and demonstrates the relationship between lord and retainer. The Mermedonians unwittingly become part of such a relation by ‘imbibing’ this mead-serving. It is therefore expected that they may be ‘rewarded’ for this drink and that they thus enter into a new bond as an outcome. Those Mermedonians who survive the flood, accept baptism; and the ‘bitter brew’ is thus reversing their damnation. As a reward for their conversion they can expect to be served eternal life, which is an undoing of the ‘bitter drink’ served to man through the fall.

The hapax legomenon *ealuscerwen*, ‘a serving of ale’, occurs in a passage of *Beowulf* in which the hero fights with the monster Grendel, who had gorged himself previously on one of Hrothgar’s retainers:

⁴⁷ K. Brooks ed., *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961, reprinted 1998), 49; ‘After the day of feasting came the bitter dregs of the mead; the warriors shook off sleep. A sea, disturbed to its depths, was encroaching upon the land. The people were panic-stricken by the sudden peril of the deluge; doomed, they died. Because of the man’s voice, a battle-charge swept off the young men, in the form of the flood. It was a brewing of sorrow, a bitter beer-drinking: cup-bearers and serving men did not dally, and right from the start of the day there was drink enough to hand for everyone’; trans. Bradley, 149.

Feasting Between the Margins

Dryht-sele dynede Denum eallum wearð,
ceaster-buendum, cenra gehwylcum,
eorlum ealu-scerwen. (*Beowulf*, ll. 767–9a)⁴⁸

Scholars have long noted the semantic proximity of the two words and discussed possible intertextual relations between the two poems as a means of explaining the unusual terms. *Andreas* shows some stylistic similarities to *Beowulf*, which has previously led to the assumption that the former is consciously based on *Beowulf*, but it is now suggested that the two poets were simply drawing on the same poetic stock.⁴⁹ There are certainly similarities between the two poems: both describe the fight of one man against a monstrous race with cannibal tendencies. However, in contrast to *Andreas*, there is no ‘bitter drinking’ in *Beowulf*. The monster Grendel, who is described as a blood-drinker and cannibal (ll. 742–5), gives the retainers of King Hrothgar’s hall a portion of terror, but the outcome ultimately is positive for the Danes.

For those Mermedonians who survive the bitter drinking, this serving of mead is a turning point, since they will be converted thereafter. However, no conversion takes place in *Beowulf* and no redemption is possible for the Grendelkin. Their *nið-sele*, ‘enemy hall’, beneath the mere is the very mirror of the hall of humans (ll. 1512a–16b) and their hospitality remains grossly distorted.

Food seems to be an important means for the *Beowulf* poet to portray a lack of civilisation. Grendel’s eating habits are furious and voracious. The monster does not eat but gorges himself on the flesh of his adversaries:

Ne þæt se aglæca yldan þohte
ac he gefeng hraðe forman siðe
slæpendne rinc, slat unwearnum
bat ban-locan, blod edrum dranc,
syn-snædum swealh; sona hæfde
unlyfigendes eal gefeormod,
fet ond folma . . . (*Beowulf*, ll. 739–45a)⁵⁰

and in his fury makes a meal out of the sleeping retainers:

þonne he Hroðgares heorð-geneatas
sloh on sweofote, slæpende fræt
folces Denigea fyf-tyne men,
ond oðer swylc ut offerede,
laðlicu lac (*Beowulf*, ll. 1580–4a)⁵¹

⁴⁸ ‘The lordly hall rang with the din. For all the Danes dwelling in the fortress, for those earls and for every brave man it was the bitter dregs of the ale’; trans. Bradley, 432. Wrenn’s edition hyphenates *ealuscerwen*, but most scholars just use one word.

⁴⁹ D. Scragg, ‘*Andreas*’, in: M. Lapidge *et al.*, *Blackwell Encyclopaedia*, 32. A more traditional view is taken by Anita Riedinger, ‘The formulaic relationship between *Beowulf* and *Andreas*’, in: H. Damico and J. Leyerle eds., *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: studies in honor of Jess B. Bessinger Jr.*, Studies in Medieval Culture 32 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), 285–312.

⁵⁰ ‘The monster did not intend to delay, but as a start he hastily grabbed a sleeping soldier, tore him apart without any trouble, chewed his joints, drank the blood out of his veins and gulped him down in gobbets. Soon he had consumed the whole of the lifeless man, even his feet and hands’; trans. Bradley, 431.

⁵¹ ‘. . . he slew members of Hrothgar’s household during their night-rest, devoured as they slept fifteen men of the Danish nation, and carted out and away as many again, as his loathsome spoil’; trans. Bradley, 453.

In contrast with the splendour of the hall, where the only direct consumption is presented in form of the cup that is offered to the retainers by the queen, there are various versions of grotesque food consumption both in *Beowulf* and *Andreas*.⁵² It seems that eating in the poems is banished to the realm of the monstrous, where it is essentially a death-bringing activity. Beowulf's fight with the sea-monsters precedes his encounter with Grendel and the subsequent battle with mother of the fiend. The tale, which is recounted by the hero, applies images of the anti-banquet, a grotesque inversion of the feast. There are several different uses of eating images: the sea-monsters are assembled to devour Beowulf, but the hero refuses to 'dine' with the creatures and to become part of their feast:

. . . Me to grunde teah
fah feond-scaða, fæste hæfde
grim on graþe; hwæpre me gyfeþe wearð,
þæt ic aglæcan orde geræhte,
hilde-bille; heaþo-ræs fornam
mihtig mere-deor þurh mine hand.
Swa mec gelome lað-geteonan
þreatedon þearle; ic him þenode
deoran sweorde, swa hit gedefe wæs.
Næs hie ðære fylla gefean hæfdon,
man-fordædlan, þæt hie me þegon,
symbol ymbsæton sæ-grunde neah;
ac on mergenne mecum wunde
be yð-lafe uppe lægon
sweordum aswefede . . . (*Beowulf*, ll. 553b–67a)⁵³

Instead of the flesh of the hero anticipated by the creatures, Beowulf turns their actions on their head and 'feeds' the monsters with his sword, serving unpleasant 'sustenance' to the attackers. The use of the term *symbol*, 'feast', for this occasion is deliberate. This passage is not only narrated during a feast, but is also at a crucial stage of the relationship between the hero and the king, since Beowulf seeks to be accepted into Hrothgar's household. The hero, who is about to join the retinue, uses the image of the failed feast to underline that he will not compromise his obligations, which come as part of being a *beodgeneað*, 'table companion'.⁵⁴ This scene is not without irony. Beowulf, who describes himself as a destroyer of 'feasting' here (analogous to Scyld Scefing, who destroyed the mead halls of many in his rise to power, l. 5), promises the return of order (which is mainly portrayed as an undisturbed sleep after the feast) to Hrothgar's hall by removing

⁵² John Hines has recently looked at the contrasts of savage and human consumption in *Andreas*; *Voices in the Past: English literature and archaeology* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2004), 58–62.

⁵³ 'One detested fiend of an attacker dragged me to the bottom – the fierce thing had me fast in his grip; but it was granted me that I might get at the monster with my sword-point, my fighting blade. The onslaught of battle carried off the mighty sea-beast by my hand. Repeatedly, spiteful adversaries harassed me hard. I ministered to them with my excellent sword as was appropriate. The perpetrators of evil did not have the pleasure of that feast – of devouring me as they gathered around their banquet at the bottom of the sea; rather next morning, hacked by blades, they were lying stranded along the shore slain by swords'; trans. Bradley, 426.

⁵⁴ Beowulf introduces himself as Hygelac's 'table-companion', indicating the closeness that he enjoys to his liege. He is about to promise to repay Hrothgar's hospitality.

the monster that makes a meal of the king's men. While he is successful in this account, Grendel's mother will subsequently destroy the harmony of the hall again as an act of vengeance. The 'disturbed' feast of the sea-monsters anticipates the broken feasting of Hrothgar's court, but at the same time indicates that feast days for monsters are over.

In the same way as *Beowulf* has an encounter with monstrous creatures before the main battle with the Grendelkin, *Andreas*, too, contains a short and significant passage that acts as a prelude to Andrew's dealings with the Mermedonians. The saint's journey takes him through perturbed waters, where *wælgifre*, 'slaughter-greedy', creatures surround the ship (ll. 369–72), but they cannot harm the man who has Christ as his helmsman. Once Andrew has liberated Matthew and his companions from prison, he goes back to the city of the Mermedonians, where he is faced by a throng of people who stand with their weapons drawn, intending to make a meal out of him (ll. 1067–74). What may have amounted to a funeral feast is averted by the hero's faith. Both *Beowulf* and *Andreas* share negative associations of monstrous meals, conducted by those who are beyond the bonds of civilised society.

FEASTING AND THE CHURCH

The negative depictions of death-bringing feasts seem to suggest that Anglo-Saxon literature was all piety and gloom, with not a shred of food in sight. However, in other places, as in the poem of the *Phoenix* food is a wonderful gift from God, and while depictions of eating seem to be predominantly negative in Anglo-Saxon literature, there is also appreciation and gratitude for such gifts. Even the most zealous of Anglo-Saxon religious writers did not for once expect their audience to live like Guthlac or Mary of Egypt, who is possibly the first 'holy anorexic' of English literature.⁵⁵ Feasting remains an important image for Anglo-Saxon writers. The stress is on the fact that such feasting should be conducted in a context that is pleasing to God and his representatives. Secular feasting leads to all kinds of corruption, whereas 'heavenly food', such as the Eucharist, saves many a saint from starvation.⁵⁶ In all of these cases the emphasis is not on lavish banqueting, but the food of Christian salvation. In contrast, the 'love of food' and unrestrained appetites are regarded as dangerous:

⁵⁵ In the later Middle Ages there are plenty of examples of 'holy anorexia', which refers to women starving themselves as a sacrifice to God and to atone for their sins; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the religious significance of food to medieval women* (Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 1987).

⁵⁶ For example, St Anastasia, after being thrown into a cell without food or water for sixty days by the Emperor Diocletianus, emerges as fresh and rosy as the day she was imprisoned. She was visited every night by St Theodota, who brought her *heofonlicu gereordu*, 'heavenly food'; Herzfeld, *Martyrology*, 4. Divine feeding is extended to the Israelites on their way from captivity, because God chose Mary to come from these people, according to Ælfric; *De initio creatura*, Clemoes, Ælfric, *Homilies*, 187, ll. 233–5. The feeding of the weary is also described in *Exodus* ll. 129b–31, *ASPR* 1, 94.

Feasting the Dead

In þam mægwlite monge lifgað,
gyltum forgiefene; nales gode þigað,
ac hy lichoman fore lufan cwemað
wista wynnum. Swa ge weorðmyndu
in dolum dreame dryhtne gieldað. (*Guthlac A*, ll. 460–4)⁵⁷

This passage plays on the theme of repaying: *þigan* can mean ‘accept’ as well as ‘to take food’. The word ‘dream’ can denote both revelry and feast. Guthlac is certainly not one of those people who spend their life in stupid revelry, but has deliberately set himself apart from human society, which includes rigorous adherence to fasting. For his restraint he is ‘rewarded’ with favour (*Þonc gegylde*, l. 471b) by God.

The fact that healthy appetites seem to be frowned on by Anglo-Saxon religious writers may have influenced reasons for curbing any depictions of feasting in the texts, not only those of funerals.⁵⁸ There are, however, further motives why clerics such as Ælfric denounce secular feasting for the dead. Feasting creates new networks and consolidates old connections, and those who are feasted will be indebted for their entertainment. In the eyes of the Church the death of the body is only one step, but ultimately the state of the soul, which survives this event, is more serious.⁵⁹ It is reasonable to assume that clerics like Ælfric saw no necessity for any additional feast but the funeral service, and that any of the drinks served at the secular feast could as well be paid as alms for the poor. Funerary feasting may have also served as a display of power, as indicated in the rich grave displays from pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England. Such pomp, as already shown, was distasteful to clerics. It may have been an opportunity to show off the family wealth and influence. Bonnie Effros, writing about Merovingian Gaul, underlines the status that is created through funerary feasting, which may serve to enhance the power of the deceased and his or her family or religious house.⁶⁰

Such shows of power challenge the office and jurisdiction of the minster or church to which the dead had been affiliated. In the comparison with a lavish funerary display and feast, the offices for the dead may pale into insignificance. It also undermined the authority of the local priest in his decision-making of who could and who would be remembered and the fashion in which this was to be done. Thus clerics were keen to stress the ‘inappropriate’ behaviour at feasts, such as drunkenness, dancing and singing of secular feasts.⁶¹ These measures, however, may have only been a partial success, since vessels and ceramics continue to be buried with the dead for generations.⁶² Martin of Braga, who is an influential source for Ælfric elsewhere,⁶³ bans Christians from bringing food to

⁵⁷ ‘In this form many men live, given to sin, not accepting God, but please their bodies for the sake of love through the joy of food. Thus the honour is repaid to the Lord with stupid revelry.’

⁵⁸ Wedding feasts are equally absent.

⁵⁹ Grundy, *Books and Grace*, 218.

⁶⁰ Effros, *Creating a Community*, 76.

⁶¹ Effros, *Creating a Community*, 76, with a particular reference to the sermons of Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones I*, 242.

⁶² Effros, *Creating a Community*, 77.

⁶³ Ælfric’s homily *De Falsis Deis* is strongly influenced by Martin of Braga’s homily *De Correctione Rusticorum*.

the dead and suggests, in an obvious reference to Ambrose's ideas of the sacrament, that the Eucharist is a more fitting sacrifice.⁶⁴

If lay people were discouraged from such rituals, there is even more need to prevent the clergy from being entertained at secular feasting. Instructions about the abstention from feasting go back a long while. Alcuin in his letter to the monks of Wearmouth and Jarrow forbids his fellow monks to indulge in 'secret feasting':

Absconditas commessiones et furtivas ebrietates quasi Joveam inferni vitate; dicente Salomone: 'Aquaе furtivae dulciores et panes absconditi suaviores sunt, sed et apud inferos illarum sunt conviviae; volens intellegi talibus aepulis daemones esse praesentes. . . .'⁶⁵

The *Capitulary* of Theodulf, which was composed either in the late eighth or early ninth century and has been preserved in various Old English translations in eleventh-century manuscripts, explicitly forbids priests to get drunk, eat or drink in alehouses and to go to strangers' towns or houses in search of entertainment. The priest should not feast with women or men in an impure state.⁶⁶ The *Canons of Edgar* not only forbid priests contact with drunkards⁶⁷ but also prohibit playing a musical instrument, either themselves or with someone else, and to be ale-scops.⁶⁸

Wulfstan's *Canon Laws* prohibit a priest from entering a tavern for eating or drinking.⁶⁹ It is somehow strange to imagine priests habitually visiting taverns, but it is obvious that monks or clerics who travelled between monasteries or churches had to seek accommodation. In the light of such prohibitions, travelling priests were dependent on the hospitality of other monastic houses. Æthelwold's *Regularis Concordia* urges the monasteries to be hospitable in accordance with the Rule of St Benedict, who asks that all guests be received like Christ.⁷⁰ The

⁶⁴ Effros, *Creating a Community*, 77.

⁶⁵ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 19, 55:

'Avoid private feasting and secret drinking as the snares of hell. "Stolen waters are sweeter," according to Solomon, "and bread eaten in secret is pleasant, but those who feast on them are in hell", meaning that devils are present at such feasts'; trans. Allott; see also Proverbs 9: 17–18.

⁶⁶ H. Sauer ed., *Theodulfi Capitula in England: Die altenglischen Übersetzungen, zusammen mit dem lateinischen Text* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1978), 319:

Ne sceolon mæssepreostas æt ceapeaðelum ne etan ne drincan, ne hyg ne sceolon fremdra manna tunas ne hus ne for nanre wæfereornnyssse secan, ne mid wifum ne mid manum unclænum hadum nane gebeorscipe habban

'Mass priests shall not eat and drink with shopkeepers, and he shall not seek out the house or town of a stranger out of curiosity, he shall not have companionship with any woman or man of unclean character.'

⁶⁷ R. Fowler ed., *Wulfstan of York, Canons of Edgar*, EETS OS 266 (London: OUP, 1972), 14, article 58: . . . And we lærað þæt preostas beorgan wið ofedruncen and hit georne belean oðrum mannum . . . , 'And we teach that priests guard themselves against drunkenness and also eagerly dissuade other men from it.'

⁶⁸ Fowler, *Canons of Edgar*, article 59: . . . And we lærað þæt ænig preost ne beo ealascope, ne on ænige wisan gliwige mid him silfum oðrum mannum, ac beo swa his had[e] gebirað, wis and weorðfull. . . . , 'And we teach that no priest should be an ale-scope, and not play a musical instrument in any way [the semantic range of *gliwian* goes from playing an instrument to singing or even telling a joke], either by himself or with another man, but conduct himself in a manner worthy of his habit, wise and honourable.'

⁶⁹ Cross and Hamer, *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collections*, 120.

⁷⁰ This is also mirrored in Wulfstan's *Canon Law Collection*, where, in a reference to Paul, bishops are

abbot is supposed to break his fast and entertain the guests, who are otherwise to be kept strictly from the other monks.⁷¹

The question remains why there is such a need to separate priests from their flock and at what occasions did monks and priests, clerics and canons, have an opportunity to feast with the laity? Parish priests were not independent – they remained members of the retinue of manorial lords, and in some cases were even unfree.⁷² Priests were habitually overseeing the celebration of saints' days and feast days, and they would have also been present at vigils for the dead, when the cleric was supposed to administer the last rites. We know from various *ordines* for the dead that priests and clerics attended to the dying and the dead body, while secular rites, such as the washing and dressing of the body, took place. Religious men seemed to have been with the body until the time of interment, and possibly may have even have been with the congregation afterwards. It seems that some people used the opportunity to gain a more lenient punishment for their sins from priests at such occasions, which may be one reason for clerics to abstain from any feasting in conjunction with the funeral.⁷³ That priests attended such occasions is evident from sources such as the Frankish cleric Hincmar, who in 852 forbids priests to participate in the banquets for the dead, as well as participating *in animae bibere*, 'to drink to the soul'.⁷⁴ The Irish annals of the monastery of Tallacht forbid the taking of meals with a dead man in the house (of the deceased).⁷⁵

Why did the Church wish to intervene in such relations? Surely one reason must be that the function of the feast is to be an opportunity for bonding and that there remains an obligation to repay the hospitality from those who have received sustenance. A priest participating in such occasions may not have only compromised his position through drunken behaviour, but would have also obliged to return a favour by attending the feast. Since churches were anxious to keep jurisdiction over the burial rites and associated income, there may have been a danger that services, such as burial and subsequent revenue, may have been lost through private transactions. Evidence from the *Benedictine Rule* suggests that contact with the outside world was very much limited for most monks,⁷⁶ but in the case of parish priests this would have been neither desirable nor practical. Feasting, as stressed before, is part of a gift-exchange, and the feast may have been regarded as an alternative 'payment' for services, which would have otherwise been given to the Church.

urged to be: *hospitalem, benignum, sobrium, sanctum*, 'hospitable, kindly, sober, pious'; Cross and Hamer, *Wulfstan's Canon Law*, 68.

⁷¹ McCann, *Rule of St Benedict*, chap. 53, 118; Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, chap. 10, 62. Maundy, which is linked to the Last Supper of the Lord (John 13: 1–20), is a time where the monks are obliged to feed the poor.

⁷² Blair, *Church*, 492.

⁷³ Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones*, 242–3.

⁷⁴ *Capitola synodica*, PL 125 (1879), 776.

⁷⁵ Cf. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 85.

⁷⁶ Monks are forbidden to meet people of importance either inside or outside the monastery for the purpose of feasting. Only when the wellbeing of the monastery depends on it are they allowed to make exceptions; Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, 7: *potentibus uero, non causa conuiuandi sed promonasterii utilitate atque defensione quotiens expederit, obuiandi intra infraue monasterium licentiam habeant*.

The celebration of a feast in honour of the dead may have been regarded as premature, since the soul was not yet ‘free’ and sins had not been paid for in full. The concept of a ‘heavenly feast’ for the righteous permeates medieval theology and also appears as a literary motif in some surviving religious poems. For example, towards the end of the poem *The Dream of the Rood*, the dreamer relates a vision of heaven. The poet of the *Rood* uses the images of feasting to show the reward that the faithful reap for their good deeds:

... þær is blis mycel,
dream on heofonum, þær is Dryhtnes folc
geseted to symle, þær is singal blis,
ond he þonne asette þær ic syþþan mot
wunian on wuldre well mid þam halgum,
dreames brucan⁷⁷

A place at the feast has to be earned, and it is perhaps not surprising that the image of the heavenly feast is promised to faithful Christians as compensation for their struggles. Patristic writers, such as Ambrose, use the image of the ‘heavenly feast’ to the picture the souls of the departed who have achieved salvation. They will be feasted in a garden, where honey, bread, milk and wine are served.⁷⁸ No such delights are promised as part of the heavenly feast in Anglo-Saxon texts. Instead the proximity of saints and the fellowship of the patriarchs is assured to the survivors of the judgement on Doomsday in the tenth-century *Vercelli Homily* 21:

Witodlice we cumað orsorge on domes dæge toforan Cristes þrymsetle, ⁊ beoð rihtwise
þonne on ecum gemynde. ⁊ we beod fram him gecigede to þam heofonlican gebeorscipe
mid þam mærum heahfæderum Abrahame ⁊ Isace ⁊ Iacobe ⁊ eallum haligum werude.⁷⁹

Christ II, which is one of the opening poems of the *Exeter Book*, also includes the motif of the heavenly feast, but the setting is much more reminiscent of earthly mead halls. The poem, whose theme is set on the Ascension, shows Christ entering heaven as a shining hero, surrounded by a host of angels to meet with the heavenly king at the high-seat.⁸⁰ The triumph of the victorious Christ, who has defied death, is not far from that of other hero figures. It seems that the heavenly feast of Anglo-Saxon literature, with its emphasis on the community and glory, is very much rooted in depictions of the secular mead hall.

In Cynewulf’s *Juliana* the heavenly feast, celebrated with all the glories of gift-giving, is denied to saints’ persecutor Eleusius, who is explicitly said not to expect it after drowning at sea:

⁷⁷ M. Swanton ed., *The Dream of the Rood* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1987), 100, ll. 139b–44a; ‘where there is great happiness, joy in heaven, where the Lord’s people are placed at the banquet, where there is unceasing happiness; and will then place me where I may afterwards dwell in glory and fully partake of the joy with the saints’; trans. Bradley.

⁷⁸ *Sancti Ambrosii Opera Omnia, De Bono Mortis*, PL 14 (1882), 577.

⁷⁹ ‘Truly we shall come safely on Doomsday before Christ’s glory seat, and will then be righteous in the eternal memory and we will be asked by him to the heavenly feast with the famous patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the holy multitude’; Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, 356, ll. 116–19. The homily is closely based on a translation of a Latin source, idem, 347. The *Vercelli Homilies* are preserved in the same manuscript as the *Dream of the Rood*.

⁸⁰ *ASPR* 3, 18, ll. 550b–8.

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Ne þorftan þa þegnas in þam bystran ham,
seo geneatscolu in þam neolan scræfe,
to þam frumgare feohgestealda
witedra wenan, þæt hy in winsele
ofer beorsetle beagas þegon
æpplede gold.⁸¹

The scene uses the staple ingredients of the hall, including the gift-giving, and even makes mention of a ‘beer-seat’ (*beorsetle*), perhaps the only allusion to intoxicating drinks that may be served at the heavenly feast. Writers seem to generally shy away from this aspect of the feast. The depraving of Juliana’s tormentor is in strong contrast to the reverent burial that the heroine receives. Her body is carried into the city with songs of praise. However, no welcome to a heavenly feast is mentioned for Juliana. It appears that women have no place at the *convivium caelis*. In the gendered world of the hall, feasting is reserved for the male hero, whether on earth or in heaven. But it is not only women who are excluded from such gatherings: the old and incapacitated, as well as young children, appear not to be invited to the feast.

Revelations 19: 9 promises a feast in heaven to all those who survive the Last Judgement, which, as we have seen, finds its expression in *Vercelli Homily* 21. However, the idea that this feast could be celebrated in a hall with God as the *goldwine* surrounded by his faithful retainers (saints and angels) is very much a translation into the milieu of Germanic imagery.⁸² The concept of heavenly feasting is one of the best examples for the syncretic nature of Old English poetry. It shows how a concept, which is primarily known to an aristocratic elite as a form of bonding, is used in a Christian context and how biblical text is interpreted in vernacular literature. It seems that heavenly feasting is regarded in a very positive light, but human feasting seems to be more circumspect.

It appears that in textual representations the funerary feast is transformed to a feast of life, celebrated after the purification of the soul for all eternity. In the culture of the Anglo-Saxons feasting was a positive, life-affirming act and it is not surprising that the image of feasting is used for depictions of heaven. Worldly feasting, though it inevitably continued, was not the focus of literature. Poems such as *Beowulf* describe a world gone by, in which cups once used for drinking are now the seat of dragons (ll. 2280b–83a),⁸³ and where the old bonds, created over the mead in the hall, no longer persist to ‘save’ the hero in the end. The poem of the *Seafarer*, contained in the tenth-century *Exeter Book*, uses an image of furnishing the grave with goods as a reminder of the futility of bygone acts:

⁸¹ ASPR 3, 132, ll. 683–8a. ‘The thanes in the dark dwelling, the flock of retainers in that deep pit, had no reason to look expectantly to the overlord for the appointed treasures, or that they would receive upon the beer-bench rings and embossed gold in the winehall’; trans. Bradley; 318.

⁸² There is a comparable passage in the early Middle High German *Annolied* (which is preserved in a twelfth-century manuscript), where a dreamer sees an assembly of bishops and saints in heaven; M. Curschmann and I. Glier eds., *Deutsche Dichtung des Mittelalters*, 3 vols (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1987), 1, 134–6.

⁸³ Gale Owen-Crocker assumes that this cup was meant for a reconciliation between lord and retainer. The object is stolen from the dragon’s mount, which wakes the beast. Owen-Crocker sees the article as the *potulum mortis* of the hero; *Four Funerals of Beowulf*, 187.

Feasting Between the Margins

ƿeah ƿe græf wille golde stregan
broþor his geborenum byrgan be deadum
maþmum mislicum ƿæt hine mid wille. . . (ll. 97–9)⁸⁴

The poet affirms that the deed of fashioning the body with grave goods is pointless if the soul remains uncared for. Instead, each man should seek *lof lifgendra*, *lastworda betst*, ‘the praise of the living, best of epitaphs’ (l. 73), so that they will be remembered by the children of men and take their place in Heaven at the *dream mid duguþum*, ‘the feast with the tested ones’ (l. 80). At the end of time a feast expects the faithful, and the humble and the well-connected, who have had the praise and intercession of the living either through their deeds, or by creating networks of obligation. Food and drink, however, appear to be immaterial at these eternal banquets.

⁸⁴ ‘Though he wishes to strew the grave with gold, brother to his kinsman, many treasures that he intends for him’, *ASPR* 3, 143–7.

Conclusion

Food and feasting played an important part in the funerary rites of the Anglo-Saxons, yet not every bone denotes a feast and not every structure in a graveyard indicates a *cella memoriae*. The spacing, sequence and dating of such features are important, and the complexities of feasting in the context of mortuary rites should not be underestimated. I hope to have made a case for a more detailed analysis of animal bone and other food deposits in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. At the end of the book some questions remain open, such as who exactly was feasted and to what purpose. It is also unclear whether feasting could also have taken place elsewhere, since many of the deposits are quite small and are also often the inedible parts of animals.

The post-Conversion transformation of funerary feasting may have obscured the origin of customs such as donations *super altare* or the need for creating networks of commemoration, to the point that there was a perceived need for a second, secular feast. While Christian concepts of death and afterlife are not necessarily egalitarian, they do promise the same salvation to all. The funerary display that had served the family of the deceased as a badge of identity in pre-Christian times could still be turned into a statement of power through lavish hospitality. It also allowed the kin of the dead to arrange their private forms of mourning.

The most interesting aspect of food and drink in Anglo-Saxon funerary rites is that it goes through ‘fashions’. Cremation burial frequently contains animal remains, and in many cases these seem to have been substantial. Inhumation allows the display of goods around the body, but the inclusion of large animals is wholly impractical if they obscure the body or rot around it. The inclusion of symbolic markers opens new avenues of replacement. Burial with the insignia of feasting, such as drinking cups and cauldrons, seems very much associated with the ‘final phase’ of Anglo-Saxon England, after which they disappear. However, saints, a term which, according to Patrick Geary, includes in the early Middle Ages virtually all high ecclesiastics, such as bishops and abbots,¹ continue to be buried with the insignia of feasting, such as patens and cups, representative of their role as mediators between heaven and earth. Their graves become focal points for other burials, so that communities of the dead arise. At the centre of the relationships between the living and the dead is the feast of the Eucharist, celebrated as a communal event. The royal saint may have served the political aspirations in the same way as the very visible mound of an illustrious ancestor did before, enhancing the position and memory of their kin.

¹ Geary, *Living with the Dead*, 43.

Conclusion

Churchyard burial may have been the reserve of few people during the post-Conversion period. Elaborate visible structures, such as stone slabs, sepulchres or crosses in consecrated ground, or even burial within the church, may have remained the privilege of an elite for some time, but commemoration was open to all (albeit some people had more means to pay for 'friendship'). The funeral is no longer just a reminder of a transition of the position and riches bequeathed to the living, but the dead transferred to a place where they depend on the living and where they remain a firm part of life.

The feast around the grave, which may have been a focal point of 'creating a scene', which, with its splendour and lavishness, would root the dead person's memory in the minds of the mourners, is now a prolonged affair, a repeat event, continued into eternity.

The replacement of the funeral feast through commemorative practices and almsgiving poses the question whether the origin and purpose of such customs was apparent to the laity. The instalment of a second funerary feast, as evident in the will of Wægen, may demonstrate the need for a rite of passage that is other than just a religious service. The efforts of Augustine and other theologians to turn funerary feasts into opportunities to collect alms for the poor, or the demands of Ælfric to abandon alcoholic beverages on such occasions, were only partly successful, especially if we consider that even in the twenty-first century the funeral of Christians (however nominal) is generally still followed by a wake.

It may be a coincidence, but before the development of a ritualised commemoration, which is performed around the liturgy in the eighth century, there do not seem to exist specific instructions for commemorative services. This is also the period of great changes, when grave goods are given up and the variety of burial options is at its greatest choice. Whether there is a link remains to be seen, but it should be noted that monastic commemoration that focuses on the celebration of the Eucharist could offer an alternative to whatever other commemorative meals and rituals had occurred in practice. The development of liturgical memory, however, is inseparable from the theological debates of the time. In particular, the nascent idea of a place in-between, which recurs in vision literature, is evidence for shifting attitudes towards the dead. From this point forward there is a much more ritualised care for the dead, which culminates in a growing uniformity of burial and commemoration of the tenth century. While it seems that there is a possibility to compensate for wrongs through intercession in much of the earlier period, even for the heaviest of sins, the development of a coherent care for the dead also allowed the withdrawal of sacred space as a threat against those who deviated, and who by the tenth century could be permanently excluded from communion and Christian burial spaces.

In a sense burials had come full circle: the kin groups observed at pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, which may have been dispersed by the variety of options in the eighth and ninth centuries, were united again. The bond between the living and the dead was reiterated at the feast of the Eucharist: the living, who had received possessions and provisions from the dead, feasted in the memory of those who had bestowed their worldly goods on them. It is also apparent that secular mortuary rites involving food and drink had not been replaced either, but

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continued to be celebrated. Food, according to Old English writers, is a gift from God that should not be taken for granted or squandered lightly. Those who do so are the wicked, sub-human and bestial, who have little regard for the Lord's creation. Eating is no longer the fulfilment of bodily needs or a pleasurable experience, but, as with most depictions of human endeavours in Old English literature, it becomes a highly emotive concept.

Wakes survived the great changes within Western Christianity, they were not affected by the schisms of the later Middle Ages, nor replaced during the Reformation, when necrologies and paid intercession ceased to exist in England. The dead, however, have had a worse deal: feared or forgotten, they await being brought back to the attention of the living.

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